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THE
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OF THE
REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.
WITH COPIOUS INDEXES,
PREPARED BY THE REV.
THOMAS HARTWELL HORNE, B.D.

HORÆ HOMILETICÆ:

OR

DISCOURSES

DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

SENIOR FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

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LUKE.

MDLI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH.

Luke xvii. 5, 6. *And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamine-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.*

THE Gospel is truly "a doctrine according to godliness:" its precepts are as much superior to heathen morals, as its doctrines are to the heathen mythology. The forgiveness of injuries is required of the followers of Christ, to an extent that unassisted reason would have deemed neither practicable nor desirable. Our Lord told his Disciples, that they must not only forgive any occasional offence, but forgive it, however often it might be committed; provided the offender acknowledged his fault, and professed a determination to amend it. This seemed to them "an hard saying," and a requisition which far exceeded the powers of human nature to comply with: they therefore entreated him to "increase their faith." Now such a petition, so introduced, appears absurd: but it was, in reality, most judicious. In proof of this we shall shew,

I. The reason of it—

At first sight we are ready to think that they should have prayed for an increase of *patience* or of *love*; since those graces appear far more intimately

connected with the forgiveness of injuries than *faith*: but they were correct in their judgment, and right in their petition: for, respecting faith, it must be said,

1. It is the root of all acceptable obedience—

[We may perform works that shall *appear* good, though we have no faith; but none that are *really* good: for, in order to be good and acceptable to God, they must flow from a principle of love to God; they must also be performed with a readiness of mind, as to the Lord: and with an unfeigned desire that he may be glorified by them. But whence can we obtain this principle? or how can we act in such a manner, or for such an end, if we have not been led by faith into a view of his glorious character, and to the knowledge of the obligations we owe him in Christ Jesus? We might as well expect to find fruit on a tree that has no root, as such actions without an humble and lively faith. Our Lord himself tells us, that “without him,” that is, without an union with him by faith, “we can do nothing:” and St. Paul tells us, that “without faith it is impossible to please God.” The Thirteenth Article of our Church also confirms the same in the most express terms. Indeed all holy actions and affections are called, “the fruits of the Spirit:” but it is by faith only that we obtain the Spirit: consequently, they must all be traced to faith, as the proper root from whence they spring.]

2. It is particularly influential in the production of a forgiving spirit—

[Till we know what we ourselves merit before God, and what mercy is offered to us in the Gospel of his Son, we shall be disposed to resent an injury that is done to us: at least, if we abstain from any vindictive acts, we shall feel an inward corroding of spirit, when the remembrance of the injury occurs to our minds. But let a person have a just view of redeeming love, and it will soon calm all his angry passions: when pained with the recollection of the evil treatment he has received, he will call to mind his own conduct towards God: when disposed to complain of others, he will think what reason he has given to God to complain of him: and when called upon to exercise forgiveness, he will bear in mind what mercy he himself has exercised at the hands of God. This, I say, is the necessary fruit of faith: for, “having been forgiven ten thousand talents, can he take a fellow-creature by the throat for a few pence?” No: “having been forgiven much, he will love much.”]

Having on these grounds presented to their Lord

* Matt. xviii. 32, 33.

a petition for an increase of faith, he approved of their petition, and proceeded instantly to mark.

II. The importance of it—

Two things he intimates to them ;

1. That faith was an irresistible principle—

[What could convey an idea of difficulty more than the plucking up of a sycamore-tree by the roots, and planting it steadfastly in the tempestuous ocean? yet our Lord told them, that faith would be able to effect even that; and, consequently, it could pluck up by the roots their most inveterate resentments, and establish their minds even in the midst of the most tumultuous scenes. Accordingly we find that faith has done all these things^b: and what it has done for others, it can, and shall, do for us. Indeed, it brings, if we may so express ourselves, a kind of omnipotence into the soul, inasmuch as it interests Omnipotence in our behalf: and God himself says concerning it, "All things are possible to him that believeth." Nor is this true only of faith in its most enlarged measure, and its strongest exercises: if it exist only in a small measure, it shall operate nevertheless to the production of the greatest good. Doubtless its effects will be proportioned to the measure of its existence in the soul: but still its operation will be exceeding powerful, even though it be small "as a grain of mustard-seed;" for the weakest faith, if genuine, unites us to Christ, and makes us partakers of all his fulness, even as the branch of a vine participates all the virtue of the stock and root. Moreover the smallest faith brings the Holy Spirit into the soul, and secures to us his almighty operations as far as they shall be necessary for our welfare. It also interests us in all the promises; every one of which shall be fulfilled to us in their season. Though therefore strong faith will bring more glory to God, the weakest faith shall ultimately prevail to the saving of our souls.]

2. That they had done well in asking it at his hands—

[Our Lord did not decline the honour which they offered him. On many occasions they had asked of him what none but God could bestow: and, had he not been God, as well as man, he would have rectified their error, and taught them to pray only and exclusively to his heavenly Father. When John mistook an angel for the Deity, and "fell at his feet to worship him, the angel forbade him, saying, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant: worship God^c." So our Lord himself, when a certain lawyer, who conceived of him only as a man,

^b Heb. xi. throughout.

^c Rev. xix. 10.

gave him a title due only to God, reproved him, saying, "Why callest thou me *good*? there is none good but One, that is God." But here he so commended the subject of their petition as manifestly to intimate his approbation of the petition itself. In like manner, when Paul, some years afterwards, prayed to him for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, Jesus answered him, "My grace is sufficient for thee^d:" thereby leaving no room for doubt but that we may address our prayers to him, and that "he will fulfil all our petitions." "Do we then need faith; or, possessing it already in a small degree, do we need to have it strengthened and increased?" let us remember, that "whatsoever we shall ask of him, or of the Father in his name, that will He do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son^e." He has "all fulness treasured up in him;" yea, "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily:" and "out of his fulness shall we all receive, even grace for grace." As repentance is his gift^f, so is faith also his gift^g: wherever it exists, it is He who has wrought it in the heart^h; for he is both "the Author and the Finisher of itⁱ." Let us then from day to day present to him the petition in our text, "Lord, increase our faith."]]

Now from this subject we may clearly LEARN,

1. The true order of Christian duties—

[The Apostles asked for faith in order to produce in them a suitable practice: and this is what we also must do: we must not set ourselves, as many ignorantly do, first to perform good works, in order that they may serve as a *warrant* for believing in Christ: but we must believe in him, in order that we may be enabled to perform good works to his honour and glory. This may appear an unnecessary distinction; but it is of infinite importance: it lies at the very foundation of all our hopes, and of all our comforts. If we attempt to reverse this order, we shall be like persons who should prepare a superstructure without laying a foundation, or expect fruit from a tree that had no root. The Scripture is very express on this subject: we must lay hold on the promises first, and then make use of them for the purifying of our souls^k: we must first behold the glory of the Lord in the Gospel, and then by virtue of that sight be changed into his image^l.]

2. The proper tendency of faith—

[Why did the Apostles ask for faith? Was it to *set aside* the duties that had been just inculcated? No: it was, that

^d 2 Cor. xii. 8—10.

^e John xiv. 13.

^f Acts v. 31.

^g Acts xviii. 27. Eph. ii. 8. Phil. i. 27.

^h Col. ii. 12.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

^k 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 18.

they might be able to practise them. Perverse people will, though instructed to the contrary ten thousand times, represent the duty of faith as having a licentious tendency: but look into the Scriptures, and see how it wrought on the saints of old: or look to the fruits that are uniformly ascribed to it in the Scriptures: Is it not "by faith that we overcome the world?" Is it not also represented as "working by love" and "purifying the heart?" Perhaps it may be thought to *bring us to* duties in the first instance, and to *set us above* them afterwards. But behold its operation in its more advanced state; and hear what St. Paul says of the Thessalonian Church; "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and (what? you are therefore above attending to good works? No: but) the charity of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth^m." Know then, that the prejudice which so generally obtains both against the grace and the doctrine of faith, is without any just foundation: and that, though a counterfeit grace will produce only a semblance of fruit, a living faith will uniformly operate to the production of good works.]

3. The folly of calling ourselves believers, whilst we exercise an unforgiving spirit—

[It must be confessed, that many will pretend to faith, who yet indulge very unhallowed dispositions: they are proud, and wrathful, and vindictive; if not to the same extent as others, yet sufficiently to shew, that they are yet unsanctified and unrenewed. And what shall we say to such persons? Shall we encourage them to think that these tempers are to be regarded only as the infirmities of saints? No, in truth: "they are not the spots of God's children," but the proper character of the devil's. The criterion given of his people is universal and infallible; "By their fruits ye shall know them: a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, nor a good tree bad fruit:" therefore our Lord repeats the admonition, "By their fruits ye shall know themⁿ." Excuse not then yourselves, ye morose, quarrelsome, fretful, unforgiving people; for ye are trees that shall be "cut down and cast into the fire^o:" ye are "trees, whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever^p." Talk not of grace: for grace, that is not effectual, is no grace; and faith, that produces not holy tempers, is no better than the faith of devils^q. If you complain, that you cannot overcome your tempers; I would say, Set about it in the right way. You make resolutions perhaps; and break

^m 2 Thess. i. 3. ⁿ Matt. vii. 16—20. ^o Matt. vii. 16—20.

^p Jude, ver. 12, 13.

^q Jam. ii. 19, 20. with 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

them as soon as made: but go rather and exercise faith on God, and on his great and precious promises: go and contemplate the incomprehensible love of Christ in dying for you: go and sprinkle his blood upon your conscience, and get a sense of his pardoning love upon your soul: Go, I say, and get your faith increased, and exercised; and you shall no longer have to complain of want of power to do the will of God: let him "perfect that which is lacking in your faith;" and you will then be enabled to perfect that which is lacking in your practice: "through him strengthening you, you will be able to do all things^r."]]

^r Tit. iii. 8.

MDLII.

THE OBEDIENT SERVANT.

Luke xvii. 10. *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

PRIDE is deeply rooted in the heart of man. It was that which first instigated him to disobedience; he wished to be as God^a. Since his fall it leads him openly to cast off his allegiance to the Supreme Being, and to become a god unto himself, independent, self-seeking, and self-sufficient. This principle operates even in the renewed mind, and endangers the acceptance of our persons and services^b. Our Lord frequently cautioned his Disciples against it. He had just inculcated the arduous duty of forgiving injuries^c, and had assured them that, however difficult it might be, faith would enable them to fulfil it^d; but, aware that such obedience might serve as an occasion for pride and vain-glory, he now teaches them, by a just comparison^e, what thoughts they should ever entertain even of their best services. We shall consider, I. The comparison—

The extent of God's authority over us is not sufficiently considered. There is no slave so much at

^a Gen. iii. 5.

^b 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^c ver. 3, 4.

^d ver. 3, 6.

^e ver. 7—9.

his master's disposal as we are at God's. The Jews exercised a most despotic power over their servants—

[Some of the servants among the Jews were captives taken in war: others were slaves bought with money. Over these, their master had unlimited authority. They were regarded by him as his stock, and, like his cattle, were transmitted to his children as a part of their inheritance^f. They were employed in all kinds of services: nor did their master esteem himself indebted to them for any services they might perform. This was perfectly well known to those whom our Lord addressed^g. Perhaps many of his hearers had servants whom they so treated. Hence our Lord appealed to them respecting the truth of his statement.]

But God has an infinitely higher claim to our services—

[He *originally formed us* in the womb. We have not a faculty which we did not receive from him. This gives him an entire right over us^h. He, upon this very ground, has an unlimited authority over the greatest monarch, as much as over the meanest slaveⁱ. He has *preserved us* every moment since our first existence in the world. However he may have made use of second causes, he has been "the author of every blessing" we have enjoyed. The beasts are not so dependent on their owner as we on him. On this ground he claimed the homage of his people of old^k, and may justly demand our utmost exertions in his service. He moreover has *bought us* with a price: he has paid down a sum which exceeds all calculation. Silver and gold were insufficient for the cost: nothing would suffice but the blood of his only dear Son. Behold, he withheld not the mighty ransom^l. He delivered up his Son for us all^m. And has not this given him a right over us? Can we say in any respect that "*we are our own*?" or, is not the Apostle's inference just, That we should *therefore glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his*ⁿ ?]

Hence it is evident that we can never confer an obligation upon him—

Even hired servants do not confer an obligation by the services they render. Much less do they, who belong to their master as his purchased possession. Least of all can *we* make God our debtor. We can do no more than what is our absolute duty to do. Works of supererogation exist only in the

^f Lev. xxv. 44—46.

^g In this land of liberty this state of things does not exist.

^h Isai. xlv. 21.

ⁱ Job xxxi. 13—15.

^k Exod. xx. 2, 3.

^l 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^m Rom. viii. 32.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

conceits of blind superstitious papists. The idea of performing them is arrogant in the extreme. None can entertain it in their minds without involving their souls in utter ruin. The point is decided for us by the voice of inspiration^a.]

The justness of the comparison being made to appear, we proceed to consider,

II. The command grounded upon it—

The injunction in the text is manifestly grounded on the preceding comparison. It imports,

1. That we should not be puffed up with a conceit of our high attainments—

[There is no notice taken of our manifold defects. It is supposed that we actually do *all* that is commanded us; yet even on that supposition we have nothing to boast of. However perfect our obedience were in all other respects, pride would at once debase it all: God will have no flesh to glory in his presence. The very angels, who never fell, are constrained to give all the glory to God^b. The Seraphim around the throne veil their faces and their feet as unworthy to behold or to serve their Maker^c; and the glorified saints cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, ascribing all their happiness to him alone^d. Sinful man therefore can never have whereof to glory before God. His zeal and holiness can be of no account with God if once they be made the grounds of his confidence. God, so far from approving such a proud boaster, would abhor him^e, and would surely abase him in the day of judgment^f.]

2. That we should be humbled under a sense of our unprofitableness—

[It is not possible that our works should profit God^a. Nothing that we can do can render him more happy or more glorious^b. We should live and act under a sense of this. The Apostles themselves were directed to consider their best works as worthless^c. Indeed, the truly enlightened in all ages have judged thus of themselves. Job abhorred himself in dust and ashes^d. Isaiah seemed to himself like a poor leper, at the very moment that he was favoured with a heavenly vision^e. Paul accounted himself “less than the least of all saints,” yea, the very “chief of sinners^f.” In this light should we continually view our best performances, and acknowledge that “our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags^g.”]

^a Rom. xi. 35, 36.

^b Rev. v. 11, 12.

^c Isai. vi. 2.

^d Rev. iv. 10.

^e Jam. iv. 6.

^f Prov. xvi. 5.

^g Ps. xvi. 2.

^h Job xxii. 2, 3.

ⁱ The text.

^j Job xl. 4. xlii. 6.

^k Isai. vi. 5.

^l Eph. iii. 8. 1 Tim. i. 15.

^m Isai. lxiv. 6.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are looking for acceptance through their own works—

[How manifestly is your spirit contrary to that which the Gospel recommends! You are endeavouring to establish a righteousness of your own: you not only think to compensate for your sins, but to have a degree of merit sufficient to purchase heaven. Perhaps you profess only to rely on your works *in part*; but in whatever degree you expect them to weigh, you so far make God your debtor. Hear, I pray you, the voice of Christ in the text. Renounce from henceforth all self-righteousness, and self-dependence, and learn to say with the great Apostle, “I count all things but dung for the knowledge of Christ^d.”]

2. Those, who, professing to trust in Christ, are indulging self-complacency—

[It is inexpressibly difficult to maintain a truly humble spirit. Pride will rise in spite of our better judgment, and often operate when we are least aware of it. Our love of man's applause too often appears even under the garb of humility. Let us guard against self-deceit. God sees through the veil of our hypocrisy, and will leave us to feel the sad effects of our corruption: he has warned us plainly of our danger^e. “Let him therefore who thinketh that he stands, take heed lest he fall^f:” let him “not be high-minded, but fear^g.”]

3. Those who are dejected because of their unprofitableness—

[It is well to be humbled under a sense of our infirmities; but the feeling of them is an effect of divine grace. Our contrition therefore should be tempered with thankfulness. Let us not forget that such a state of mind is approved of God. Instead of desponding, let us cleave more steadfastly to Christ^h. The viler we are in our own eyes, the more precious let him be to us. Thus will he increase, as we decreaseⁱ; and we ourselves shall be exalted in proportion to our self-abasement^k. Let us in the meantime do all that we can to serve him. If we cannot *profit* him by fulfilling his commands, we may *please* him. Let that be our constant ambition^l. Then, though we have no claim upon him for a reward, he will requite our services; nor shall the smallest attempt to honour him be overlooked^m.]

^d Phil. iii. 8, 9.

^e Prov. xvi. 18.

^f 1 Cor. x. 12.

^g Rom. xi. 20.

^h Acts xi. 23.

ⁱ John iii. 30.

^k Matt. xxiii. 12.

^l 2 Cor. v. 9. φιλοτιμούμεθα.

^m Eph. vi. 8.

MDLIII.

THE TEN LEPERS HEALED.

Luke xvii. 17, 18. *And Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.*

AS the miracles of our Lord were greatly diversified, so were the effects produced by them. Sometimes they were regarded with stupid indifference; at other times they were made effectual to the conversion of sinners: we have an instance of both in the history before us—

I. Consider the various circumstances mentioned in the context—

The leprosy, though little known amongst us, was very common in Judæa: ten persons infected with it made application to Jesus for relief—

[Jesus had just been refused admission into a Samaritan village^a. On his entrance into another village the lepers saw him. How graciously was the bigotry of the Samaritans overruled for good! Had *they* used the common rights of hospitality, perhaps the lepers might never have had the opportunity that was now afforded them. It was not permitted to lepers to approach even their dearest friends. They therefore “stood afar off,” crying earnestly for relief. A sense of need will make us importunate in our supplications. But, alas! the generality are far more anxious for the removal of bodily disorders, than of spiritual maladies. Happy were it for us, if our fervour were most expressed in the concerns which most demand it!]

Jesus instantly vouchsafed a gracious answer to their petition—

[He did not indeed pronounce them whole, or even promise to make them so. He only ordered them to go to the priests, the appointed judges of leprosy^b. This however amounted to a virtual promise of healing, unless he intended only to mock and deride their misery. And it answered many valuable and important purposes. It served as a test of their faith and obedience. Their instant departure would prevent

^a Luke ix. 52, 53, 56. with ver. 12. See Dr. Doddridge's *Fam. Expos.* sect. 127.

^b ver. 14. with Lev. xiv. 2.

any combination to discredit the miracle. It would make the priests themselves to attest its reality, and might lead them to receive him as the promised Messiah. In obedience to his command, the lepers went, expecting a cure: nor were any of them disappointed of their hope. In going, they were restored by the almighty power of Jesus; and they felt in themselves infallible tokens of perfect health.]

The effects however produced upon them were not alike in all—

[Nine of them prosecuted their journey mindful only of their own comfort. Having obtained all that they wished, they forgot their Benefactor, nor ever thought of paying the debt which gratitude demanded. One, however, was more sensible of the obligations conferred upon him, and burned with a desire to acknowledge the mercies he had received. Returning instantly, he prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus. With heartfelt gratitude he glorified God as the author of his mercy, and gave thanks to Jesus, as the instrument by whom it was sent. Nor was he less ardent in his thanksgivings, than he had before been importunate in his prayers^c.]

To open these more minutely, we shall,

II. Make some reflections on the text in particular—

The first reflection which naturally arises from the text is,

1. What ingratitude is there in the human heart!

[We are amazed at the conduct of the ungrateful lepers. We are ready to suppose that nothing could induce us to act like them. Yet we may see in them a true picture of the world at large. How many *temporal* mercies have we experienced through our whole lives! What continuance of health, or deliverances from sickness! What freedom from want, or relief in the midst of it! What comfort in the society of our friends and relatives! Yet how little have we thought of him, who bestowed these blessings! How many *spiritual* mercies too have we received from God! What provision has been made for the healing of our souls! The Son of God himself has suffered, that he might “heal us by his stripes”: and offers of pardon and salvation have been proclaimed to us in his name; Yea, we have been promised a deliverance from the leprosy of sin^d, and have been entreated to become children and heirs of God. Are not these mercies which demand our gratitude? Yet what returns have we made to our adorable Benefactor? May not God complain of us as he did of the

^c ver. 13, 15

^d Rom. vi. 14.

ungrateful Jews*? Let us then abase ourselves before God under a sense of our vileness^f; nor let us justify our conduct from the example of the world. Who does not commend the singularity of the grateful leper? Who does not admire the singularity of Noah among the antediluvians, and of Lot in Sodom? Let us then dare to be singular in loving and adoring our Benefactor. Let a sense of gratitude far outweigh the fear of man. Then, though the world despise us, we shall have the testimony of a good conscience; and "our record shall be on high" in the day of the Lord Jesus^g.]

2. How often do they, who enjoy the greatest advantages, make the least improvement of them!

[The nine ungrateful lepers were, by profession, the Lord's people. They had been instructed out of the law by God's appointed ministers. The wonderful works which had been wrought for their nation could not be unknown to them. The examples of David and other eminent saints had been set before them: they therefore could not but know much of God's will respecting them. The poor "Samaritan," on the contrary, was a "stranger" to God's covenant. The prejudices of his nation forbad all intercourse with the Jews. By this means he was cut off from all opportunities of instruction: yet he returned to glorify his God, while all the Jews overlooked the mercy vouchsafed unto them. And are there not many amongst ourselves, who are far from improving their spiritual advantages? Are we not surpassed in virtue by many who never enjoyed our privileges? Are there not many illiterate and obscure persons whose hearts overflow with gratitude, while ours are as insensible as a stone? Let us remember that God expects from us according to the means of improvement he has afforded us^h; and let us labour to yield fruit suited to the culture bestowed upon usⁱ.]

3. How plain is our duty both under a need, and after the receipt, of divine mercies!

[The lepers could not possibly have adopted a wiser measure than they did: they were persuaded of Christ's power to help: and they sought help at his hands. And is not Jesus as mighty now as in the days of his flesh? Will not the diseases of the soul, as well as of the body, yield to his commands? Has he not encouraged us by many express promises of mercy? Let us then, like the lepers, cry, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us"; nor let us cease from our importunity till we have prevailed: but, if we have received answers of peace,

* Isai. i. 2, 3.

^h Luke xii. 48.

^f Job xlii. 6.

ⁱ Isai. v. 2—6.

^g Job xvi. 19.

let us be thankful for them^k. Justly did Jesus express his wonder at not seeing the other nine; much more will he if we should forget to pay him our tribute of praise. Waiting for our approaches, he says, "Where are they?" Let him then see us daily prostrating ourselves before him. Let us be earnest in our thanksgivings, as well as in our prayers. Let us often consider how we may best express our sense of his goodness^l. In his strength let us go and shew ourselves to the world. Let us compel his very enemies to acknowledge his work^m, and constrain them by our lives to confess the efficacy of his grace. Thus shall we most acceptably honour him on earth, and ere long be exalted to magnify his name in heaven.]

^k Ps. xxx. 2—4.^l Ps. cxvi. 12.^m Ps. cxxvi. 2.

MDLIV.

SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

Luke xvii. 26—30. *As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

WE cannot be too often reminded, that religion is not a matter of speculation, but of practice. The replies which our Lord constantly made to speculative or curious inquiries, leads us to this remark. He always endeavoured to turn the mind inwards, and to make every question that was put to him subservient to the spiritual welfare of his hearers. The Pharisees, ever deceiving themselves with the expectation of a temporal Messiah, asked him, "When the kingdom of God should come?" He told them, that the Messiah's kingdom was not to be an *outward* and *temporal* one, such as they looked for, but an *inward* and *spiritual* kingdom, such as he himself was now establishing in the hearts of men. But as the nation at large would reject him, he warned his hearers,

that the Son of Man should again come, even before that present generation should have passed away; that, when he did come, he would find them as supine and careless as they were at that moment; and that, unless they repented, his coming would issue in their utter destruction.

This seems to be the obvious import of the words. But, as the same expressions are used in a subsequent discourse, where they are blended with others relating to the day of judgment, we shall not confine them to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but take them as declaring in general,

I. The state of mankind at large—

We are here told what was their state in the days of old—

[In the days of Noah and of Lot the great mass of mankind were in a state of *carnal enjoyment*, of *criminal security*, and of *contemptuous unbelief*.

Their business and their pleasures altogether engrossed their minds: 'they ate and drank, and formed connexions, and got fortunes, and built houses, and planted grounds, and consulted their own happiness and comfort in the way they liked best.' This was their entire employment, and the great object of their lives: if they could but make themselves happy and comfortable in their respective stations, it was all they cared for.

Had they pursued these things in subserviency to higher and better things, there would have been no blame imputed to them: for, the eating, and drinking, and marrying, and buying, and selling, and planting, and building, were not wrong in themselves: but the evil of this state consisted in its being their chief, if not their only, occupation. Had we been told, that, in addition to these things, they wept, they fasted, they prayed, they turned to God, and served the Lord with their whole hearts, we should not have grudged them one atom of their enjoyments, or have thought the worse of them for their worldly occupations. But God was not in all their thoughts; eternity was hid from their view; the things of time and sense engaged their whole attention: they took for granted that they had nothing to fear from the hands of God, and therefore they were under no anxiety to obtain his favour. In a word, they regarded their bodily welfare, but had no concern at all about their souls.

But this security of theirs did not proceed from ignorance: the antediluvians were taught by Noah, for one hundred and twenty years together, that God would punish their supineness,

that he would punish it too by a deluge that should overwhelm the whole earth. Moreover, the ark was gradually prepared in their sight; so that at least they must see that the preacher believed his own declarations. In like manner, the inhabitants of Sodom were warned by Lot, who "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." But, as Noah was doubtless regarded as little better than a maniac, so, Lot's words, we are told, appeared, even to his own relatives, as idle tales; "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." This it was that chiefly aggravated the guilt of the persons referred to: they were called, but they would not answer; they were warned, but they would not hear: they cast God's words behind them, and set at nought all his threatenings, and poured contempt upon all his messages of love and mercy. Such was their state in the days of old.]

And similar to it will be the state of the world at the last day—

[Should we attempt to describe the state of the world at this hour, where could we find words more proper to represent it than those in the text? We may appeal to all, whether the great mass of Christians, no less than of heathens, be not divided between the two pursuits of business and pleasure? Into how many companies may you go, before you will find a person that seriously inquires, "Where is God my Maker?" We might here speak of the open sins which are every where committed without shame and without remorse: but we purposely omit the mention of any gross sin whatever, and confine ourselves to the things specified in our text as characterizing the most inoffensive part of the antediluvian world, and of the inhabitants of Sodom; because it is to the more inoffensive part of the community that we now more especially address ourselves: and we ask whether the text be not a faithful picture of them? In particular, is not serious religion held up to scorn? and are not the promoters of it considered as "the troublers of Israel?" Blessed be God, the ark is rearing in the midst of you; and there are a few who boldly protest against the impiety that prevails: but how few improve the warnings that they hear, or set themselves in earnest to flee from the wrath to come!

Nor is this picture less descriptive of those who will be alive at the day of judgment. The same carnal enjoyments will be sought then as now; the same criminal security will obtain; and the same contemptuous unbelief will decry all need of vital godliness. The people of that generation will be warned, even as you have been; and they will regard the messages of God as the dreams of gloomy superstition, or the reveries of enthusiastic folly. This state of things will continue even to the very moment that Christ shall come to judgment, precisely

as it did among the antediluvians, till the flood came, and, among the inhabitants of Sodom, till the fire came down from heaven to consume them.]

This melancholy prospect renders it necessary for me to point out,

II. The danger of that state—

We have before observed, that the text primarily refers to the coming of Christ to destroy Jerusalem, but has a further reference also to his coming to judge the world. Agreeably to this view of it, shall be our consideration of the danger that attends the state therein described.

Consider then its danger,

1. To the nation—

[There is a time when Christ comes to punish nations, just as he did to punish Jerusalem. And how shall we judge of the time that he will come? I answer, *then* is he most likely to come, when a nation is in the state before described. That he is visiting the nations now, is a fact so clear, that no thoughtful man can entertain a doubt of it. Hitherto the showers of his wrath, which have deluged other lands, have but just sprinkled ours: but the clouds are black, and gathering thick around us: and the darkest symptom is, that, “though his hand is lifted up, we will not see it.” Consult the Scriptures, and see whether this security be not the surest forerunner of his judgments? See what was the state of Jerusalem previous to the Babylonish captivity, and say whether, whilst our state so precisely accords with it, we have not reason to tremble at the prospect of her judgments^a? or let the predicted fall of the mystical Babylon be taken as a ground of your decision^b. The truth is, that, amidst all the advantages which we possess for superior piety, we take the lead in an idolatrous attachment to wealth and pleasure, and in a presumptuous confidence in an arm of flesh: we may well therefore expect, that the cup which others have drunk of, shall be put into our hands^c; and that our superior guilt will issue in more aggravated calamities^d.]

2. To individuals—

[The Lord Jesus may not in any signal manner visit men in this life; but he will infallibly call them to judgment in the world to come. For this end he will come to them, as soon as

^a Isai. xlvii. 8—11.

^b Rev. xviii. 7, 8.

^c Jer. xxv. 15, 28, 29.

^d Amos vi. 3—6. and Isai. xxii. 12—14.

they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities; and the same criterion which we have used in estimating the ripeness of *nations* for judgment, will serve us to judge of the state of individuals. God has told us, that "as fishes are taken in an evil net, and as birds are caught in a snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them^a." Moreover, to impress this the more strongly on our minds, he has represented a man, who, having succeeded in his temporal pursuits, congratulates himself on the prospect of many years of pleasurable enjoyment: and then he addresses that man in terms suited to the occasion; "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee^f." Here then we see a lively example of the state which is described in our text, and of the visit which the sinner receives from his offended Lord. May this awful representation never be realized in us! But let us tremble lest it should: for we are taught to expect, that "our Lord will come in a time that we look not for him, and at an hour that we are not aware^g:" nay more, we are assured, that, when we begin to say, "I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of my heart, *then* will God's anger and jealousy smoke against us, and he will blot out our name from under heaven^h."]

3. To the world at large—

[The precise season of the general judgment is not known to men or angels; nor was Christ himself, as man, informed of it, at least not so informed as to have it within his commission to declare it. But we have already seen in what state the world will be at its arrival. They will be expecting the period as little as we at present are. They will have been warned respecting it by the faithful ministers of Christ; but they will not regard the admonitions that are given them: they will rather scoff, as the antediluvians and the inhabitants of Sodom did, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creationⁱ. But, in the midst of all their occupations, enjoyments, projects, the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge appear in his glory. This will take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye^k." "As the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be^l." Alas! in what a condition will millions of the human race be found! some in the commission of the grossest crimes; some ridiculing the supposed weakness of their faithful

^a Eccl. ix. 12. ^f Luke xii. 45, 46.

^h Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 52.

^g Luke xii. 19, 20.

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

^l ver. 24.

monitors; and the more innocent among them occupied in nothing better than "eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage." How terrible to be called to judgment in a state so unprepared! Will the suddenness of the event be any excuse for them in that day? or will it be any reason for averting or mitigating their punishment? No: it will be with them as with those mentioned in our text: "As soon as Noah entered into the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all;" and, "as soon as Lot went out of Sodom, the fire and brimstone descended and consumed them all:" so will all, that are unprepared to meet their God, be utterly and eternally destroyed. Hence the day of judgment is called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men^m." As long as we are in this world, it is "a day of acceptance, a day of salvationⁿ." Yes, even to the eleventh hour we are warranted to invite men to return to God, and to assure them of a favourable reception: but when death or judgment arrive, there is an end of the day of grace, and then commences the day of everlasting perdition.]

ADDRESS—

1. The congregation in general—

[We would entreat every one of you to inquire, whether you are prepared to meet your God? This is no trifling question, no enthusiastic question, no party question; it is a question in which all are equally interested, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned. And we beg leave to remind you all, that an inoffensive conduct is not sufficient to secure happiness for you in the last day. You will observe, that no gross sin is imputed to the antediluvian world, or to the inhabitants of Sodom; many of them doubtless were guilty of heinous transgressions: but the universal sin, the sin that destroyed them *all*, was carelessness. Say then, brethren, whether this do not characterize your state? and whether you have not reason to tremble for the judgments that shall come upon you? You are apt to promise yourselves a more convenient season for turning to God: but how many are disappointed in that hope! Suppose that, at the deluge, there were some so far wrought upon by the ministry of Noah, that they determined to follow his advice as soon as they should have finished their present business, and got more time for spiritual employments: suppose them surprised by the flood, witnessing the destruction of thousands around them, and, from an eminence to which they had fled, seeing the ark borne up by the waves in which they were shortly to be immersed; how would they wish that they had

^m 2 Pet. ii. 7. The Greek.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

improved the day of their visitation, and fled to the ark for refuge! Thus pungent, thus fruitless, will be the remorse of millions in the day of judgment. But, blessed be God! the ark is not yet closed: it is open for all who will flee unto it: the Lord Jesus Christ never did, nor ever will, close the door against a repenting sinner: he came to seek and to save the lost; yea, he shed his blood upon the cross to save them. To every one of you then would we say, "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the door about thee, and hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast^o." But, if you will not hear, know of a certainty, that "your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not^p:" for, "if God spared not the angels that sinned . . . nor the old world . . . nor Sodom; but saved Noah . . . and delivered Lot, he knows at this time how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished^q."

2. Those amongst you who make a profession of vital godliness—

[This subject may appear to some of you to be calculated to awaken sinners, but not very well suited to the edification of saints. This conceit appears to have entered into the mind of Christ's Disciples; and to have been justly reprov'd by him: for, who is he that needs not such an admonition^r? We grant, that here are no new truths brought to our view: "you know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night;" and that when men shall say, 'Peace and safety,' then destruction shall come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness^s." But is this subject therefore uninstructional to you? Hear how the Apostle continues his address to the very persons whom he has thus described: "Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober: let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and, for an helmet, the hope of salvation^t." Hear also how another Apostle addresses the whole Christian Church: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night . . . Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God? . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found

^o Isai. xxvi. 20.

^p 2 Pet. ii. 3.

^q 2 Pet. ii. 4—9.

^r Matt. xxiv. 44—46.

^s 1 Thess. v. 2—5.

^t 1 Thess. v. 6—8.

of him in peace, without spot and blameless^u." As we said to others, that an inoffensive conduct will not suffice; so we must say to you, that a religious profession will not suffice. You know full well in what a state men ought to *die*; (how penitent, how believing, how devout in their minds, how subdued in their tempers, how superior to the world, how intent on heavenly things :) this then is the state in which you ought to *live*: that, when Jesus shall say to you, "Surely I come quickly;" you may be ready at all times to answer, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus^r."

^u 2 Pet. iii. 10—14.

^r Rev. xxii. 20.

MDLV.

LOT'S WIFE.

Luke xvii. 32. *Remember Lot's wife.*

IT is necessary for mariners frequently to consult charts or maps, which have been formed for the purpose of pointing out to them the different bearings of different countries, and of guarding them against latent obstacles which would endanger the safety of their ship. But notwithstanding the utmost care that has been taken to ascertain the situation of rocks and shoals, it often happens that ships are wrecked, where no caution has been given in the most approved charts, and where no danger was apprehended. This however cannot happen to persons sailing for the port of heaven. There is not a rock or shoal that is not plainly laid down in the inspired volume; nor is there any fear of shipwreck to those who will follow the course which is there prescribed. That multitudes do perish, notwithstanding they have that volume before them, is certain. Many who have for a long time enjoyed, like Demas, a prosperous voyage, have yet, through their inattention to the cautions given them, struck upon the rocks of worldliness, and come short of the desired harbour. But the fault is in themselves only; they have been guarded in a peculiar manner against the danger to which they were exposed: it had been said to them, and it is said to us also, "Remember Lot's wife." But let us inquire,

I. What we are to remember concerning her.

We may comprehend the whole under two heads

1. Her sin—

[She, as the history informs us, looked back towards Sodom after she had been delivered from it by the angels^a.

Is it asked, What harm there was in this? we answer, it was in many points of view exceeding sinful. It was (to speak of it in the most favourable light) a *curious* look. Curiosity may indeed be innocent in respect to some things; but in reference to others, it may be highly criminal. Who can doubt the criminality of those Bethshemites who looked into the ark; when above fifty thousand of them were struck dead upon the spot for their transgression^b? Or who that knows any thing of his own heart can doubt, whether he has not often contracted guilt by indulging an unhallowed curiosity to see, or hear, or read, things which he had no proper call to inquire into, and the knowledge of which tended only to inflame his imagination, and defile his soul? And surely the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was not a fit subject for curiosity, at a time too that she was rescued from it by the ministry of angels: her mind ought to have been very differently occupied on so awful an occasion.

But it was also an *unbelieving* look. She had been told that fire and brimstone should come down from heaven to destroy those wicked cities; and she was desirous to know whether the threatening were indeed true, or whether she was fleeing from only imaginary dangers. And was this no sin? Was not Sarah reproved for doubting an almost incredible promise^c? Was not Zacharias struck deaf and dumb for a similar fault^d? Yea, were not all the nation of Israel doomed to perish in the wilderness on account of their unbelief^e? Who then will say, What harm was there in her conduct?

Moreover, it was a *wishful* look. She had left a part of her family behind, together with (what she seemed more anxious about) the whole of her possessions; and, instead of being thankful for the preservation of her life, she was filled with regret about what she had lost. That this was a very essential part of her fault, is certain: because she is proposed as a warning to us in this particular view^f. Her treasure was more in Sodom than in heaven; and she shewed by her look, that "where her treasure was, there was her heart also." Was there then no crime in "setting her affections on things below instead of on things above?"

Lastly, it was a *disobedient* look. However innocent it

^a Gen. xix. 26.

^b 1 Sam. vi. 19.

^c Gen. xviii. 12, 13.

^d Luke i. 18, 20.

^e Heb. iii. 18, 19.

^f ver. 31.

might be in every other view, it was palpably wrong in this. The command was plain and positive; "Look not behind thee in all the plain." It was not for her to determine whether the command were more or less important; her duty was to obey it: and, in violating it, she rebelled against the Majesty of heaven. Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit might be thought a slight offence; but it ruined the whole world. And Saul's sparing of Agag and the spoil, might be called a merciful and commendable deviation from the commission given him; but it was declared to be rebellion against God, and as criminal in his estimation as witchcraft or idolatry^s.

In remembering therefore her *sin*, we should remember, that God looks not merely on our outward conduct, but at the inward principles and dispositions of the heart.]

2. Her punishment—

[This was truly *awful*. She was instantly involved in the very same ruin that overwhelmed all the cities of the plain. Not a moment was allowed her for repentance; but she was cut off in the very act of sin, and summoned into the presence of her Judge to receive her doom at his hands — — —

It was moreover *exemplary*. She was made a monument of God's holy indignation, and a warning to all future ages, that men must not trifle with sin, or be inattentive to the Divine commands. Wherever the Bible shall come, even to the very end of time, she will be held up as an example of that vengeance, which shall sooner or later overtake all whose hearts are at variance with their professions.]

It will be proper to state,

II. Why we are to bear her in remembrance—

Much there is that we may LEARN from her; but particularly,

1. Our duty—

[That we are not to be altogether "of the world," is a truth that scarcely need be mentioned to those who make any profession of religion. But very few are aware to what an extent our renunciation of it should be carried. It is not sufficient, that we do not run to the same excess of riot with the ungodly; or that we differ from them in appearance and profession: we must indeed have some intercourse with them (or else we could not fill up our several stations in life); but we must "come out from among them and be separate, and have no more communion with them than light with darkness, or Christ with Belial^b." Nor must we have our heart set upon

^s 1 Sam. xv. 22, 23.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

our property, when God in his providence is calling us to forsake it. We need not put away riches from us, if God is pleased to cast them into our lap; nor ought we to be indifferent to the preservation of them, if we can keep them together with our integrity; but they are not to be our idol; nor ought we to regret the loss of them, if we be called to sacrifice them for the honour of our God. We should have our affections withdrawn from things below, and set exclusively on things above. We should "love nothing that is in the world," so as to judge it at all necessary to our happiness: instead of wishing to accumulate possessions in it, or to enjoy its vanities, it should be our principal care to shun its pollutions, and escape its plagues¹. If we look back upon it at all, it must only be for the purpose of kindling in our hearts a more lively gratitude to God, who in infinite mercy has delivered us from it, and plucked us out of it as brands out of the burning.]

2. Our danger—

[Let not any one imagine himself safe, because he is come out of Sodom, and is associated with those who are fleeing from the wrath to come. We know that the Scripture does give many blessed assurances of the Divine protection to those who trust in God: but it is a very sinful perversion of the Scriptures to interpret them in such a manner, as to invalidate all the solemn cautions which are given against apostatizing from our profession, and falling short of the promised rest. We are in danger²: and our security principally consists in feeling our danger, and in acting conformably to those sensations. For what end are we so frequently reminded of the destruction of the Israelites after they had been brought out of Egypt, and after they had been favoured with God's visible presence in the wilderness³? or why did our Lord so strongly recommend us to "remember Lot's wife;" and tell us, that "no man, who having put his hand to the plough should look back, was fit for the kingdom of God?" or where is the man, however confident he may be about the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, who will venture to say, that he himself is in no danger of "looking back," and that he is already so "escaped from the pollutions of the world, that he never *can* be entangled again with them and overcome?" I say again, we are in danger, all of us; and it becomes us "not to be high-minded, but to fear." "Let him therefore that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

In conclusion, we would suggest a few hints respecting *the manner* in which you should obey the admonition in the text. Remember her,

¹ Rev. xviii. 4. ² 2 Pet. ii. 18, 20, and iii. 17.

³ Jude, ver. 5. 1 Cor. x. 1—6, 11, 12.

1. With *thanksgivings* to God, that you have not long since experienced a similar judgment — — —

2. With *prayer* to God, that he would “keep you by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation” — — —

MDLVI.

THE DUTY OF PERSEVERING IN PRAYER.

Luke xviii. 1. *Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*

THE efficacy of prayer is continually exhibited in the sacred writings, and every incitement to it is afforded us: nevertheless we are prone to faint in the performance of it. To encourage our perseverance in it our Lord delivered a parable. Waving all notice of the parable itself, we shall consider,

I. Our duty—

To be always in the act of prayer would interfere with other duties: that which is here inculcated, implies that we pray,

Statedly—

[Regular seasons for prayer should be fixed. Except in cases of absolute necessity^a they should be adhered to. We should constantly acknowledge God *in the public assembly*^b. We should maintain his worship also *in our families*^c; nor should we on any account omit it *in our closets*^d.]

Occasionally—

[There are many particular occasions which require us to

^a Matt. ix. 13.

^b Heb. x. 25.

^c Abraham and Joshua were noted for their attention to family religion, Gen xviii. 19. Josh. xxiv. 15: and our Lord's example is worthy of imitation; he not only expounded his parables to his disciples in private, but prayed with them. See Luke ix. 18. which means, “he was at a distance from the multitude, and praying with his disciples.”

^d How frequent the stated seasons shall be, must be left to our own discretion; David's example is good, Ps. lv. 17. But as the morning and evening sacrifices were called the *continual* burnt-offering, so they may be said to pray *always*, who pray at those returning seasons.

pray: in *prosperity*, that God may counteract its evil tendency^c: in *adversity*, that we may be supported under it^f: in times of *public distress or danger*, to avert the calamity^g.]

Habitually—

[We should maintain a spiritual frame of mind. We may have a disposition for prayer in the midst of business; nor will secret ejaculations prevail less than solemn devotions^h.]

To pray thus is our duty; “We ought,” &c.

It is a duty we owe *to God*—

[He, our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, has commanded it; nor can any thing absolve us from our obligation to obey.]

We owe it also *to our neighbour*—

[The edification of Christ’s mystical body depends, not only on the union of every part with the head, but on the whole being fitly framed together, and on every joint supplying its proper nourishmentⁱ. But if we be remiss in prayer, we shall be incapable of administering that benefit, which other members have a right to expect from us^k.]

We owe it *to ourselves*—

[A “spirit of supplication” is as necessary to the soul, as food to the body; nor can we feel any regard for our souls, if we do not cultivate it.]

It is, however, by no means easy to fulfil this duty—

II. The difficulties that attend it—

When we set ourselves to the performance of it, we shall find difficulties—

Before we begin to pray—

[*Worldly business* may occupy, or *worldly amusements* dissipate, our thoughts. *Family cares* may distract our minds, and *family disagreements* indispose us for this holy employment^l. *Lassitude of body* may unfit us for the necessary exertions. We may be disabled by an invincible *hardness of heart*. *A want of utterance* may also operate as a heavy discouragement.

^c Our liturgy teaches us to pray, *in all time of our wealth*. See Prov. xxx. 9.

^f Jam. v. 13.

^g 2 Chron. vii. 14.

^h Compare 2 Sam. xv. 31. with 2 Sam. xvii. 14, 23. See also Neh. ii. 4, 6.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 16. Col. ii. 19.

^k Samuel had a deep conviction of this truth; 1 Sam. xii. 23.

^l 1 Pet. iii. 7.

By these means many are tempted to defer their religious exercises: but to yield to the temptation is to increase the difficulty.]

While we are engaged in prayer—

[The *world* is never more troublesome than at such seasons. Something seen or heard, lost or gained, done or to be done, will generally obtrude itself upon us when we are at the throne of grace. The *flesh* also, with its vilest imaginations, will solicit our attention; nor will *Satan* be backward to interrupt our devotions^m.]

After we have concluded prayer—

[When we have prayed, we should expect an answer. But *worldliness* may again induce a forgetfulness of God; and a habit of *worldly conversation* drive every serious thought from our minds. *Impatience* to receive the desired blessings may deject us. *Ignorance* of the method in which God answers prayer may cause us to disquiet ourselves with many ungrounded apprehensions. *Unbelief* may rob us of the benefits we might have receivedⁿ. Whatever obstructs God's answers to prayer, disqualifies us for the future discharge of that duty.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us not expect victory without many conflicts. Let us remember the effect of perseverance in the case of Moses^o. Above all, let us attend to the parable spoken for this end^p. So shall we be kept from fainting under our discouragements, and God will fulfil to us his own promise^q—]

^m He has various devices whereby he strives to accomplish his purpose. He will suggest "it is needless to pray:" or, "it is presumption for so great a sinner to ask any thing of God:" or, "it is hypocrisy to ask, when the heart is so little engaged." Sometimes he will inject into the Christian's mind the most blasphemous and horrid thoughts; and at other times tempt him to admire his own fluency and enlargement in prayer. Such are the "fiery darts" with which he often assails the soul, Eph. vi. 16.

ⁿ Jam. i. 6, 7.

^o Exod. xvii. 11—13.

^p Luke xviii. 2—8.

^q Gal. vi. 9.

MDLVII.

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW.

Luke xviii. 6—8. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

THERE is no duty more strongly enforced in Scripture than that of prayer: nor is there any which needs to be more impressed upon the conscience. To those, who have never engaged in this duty with real spirituality of mind, it may appear easy to be performed; but they, who are most earnest in the discharge of it, find many difficulties to combat with. To encourage us to persevere in spite of all those difficulties, our Lord spake the parable before us^a.

We shall consider,

I. What the unjust judge said—

There was a widow labouring under some heavy oppression—

[Sin has universally armed men against their fellow-creatures. The world is full of robbery and oppression of every kind^b; and they who are most defenceless usually suffer the greatest injuries. Every one is ready to take advantage of the fatherless and the widow. It is their comfort, however, that, if they have enemies on earth, they have a friend in heaven^c.]

She went to a magistrate to redress her grievances—

[The appointment of magistrates is a rich blessing to the community, and they ought to be regarded with much respect and gratitude. We should not indeed be going to law about every trifle. We should rather settle our disputes, if possible, by arbitration; but under the widow's circumstances, it was right to solicit the magistrate's interference.]

The judge, for a long season, would pay no attention to her request—

[The judge happened to be of a most abandoned character: he had no fear of the holy, omniscient, almighty God: he did not even regard the good opinion of mankind. Thus he had no rule of conduct but his own caprice or interest. Surely, next to a vicious minister, there can be no greater curse to a neighbourhood than such an abandoned magistrate as this. We have reason to bless God, however, that though such characters are too common, they are rarely to be found among the magistracy. No wonder that such an one was deaf to the cries of equity and compassion.]

^a ver. 1.

^b Ps. lxxiv. 20.

^c Ps. lxxviii. 5.

At last, however, he acknowledged himself overcome by her importunity—

[He gloried in his contempt of all laws human and divine^d; but he could not bear the constant entreaties of the widow: he was afraid of being “wearied” or even stunned^e with her cries. He therefore, purely to get rid of her, interposed on her behalf, and did that for his own ease, which he should have done from a better motive. Thus, alas! he proclaimed his own shame; but declared, in a very striking manner, the efficacy of importunity.]

His speech, impious as it was, may be rendered profitable to our souls:

II. The improvement suggested by our Lord—

Our Lord makes a twofold application of the subject—

1. In a way of instruction—

We all, in a spiritual view, resemble this helpless widow—

[We are beset with enemies both within and without: our conflicts with indwelling corruption are great and manifold. We have moreover to contend with all the powers of darkness^f; nor have we in ourselves any strength to resist our adversaries^g.]

But God, the judge of all, will help us if we call upon him—

[God has promised to hear the supplications of his people^h: he has declared that he will “cast out none who come to him.” He may indeed for wise reasons delay his answers to prayer: he may “bear so long with us” as to make us think he will not hear; but he will never fail to succour us in the fittest season.]

This may be strongly deduced from the preceding parable—

[*The widow was a stranger* not at all related to the judge; but we are “God’s elect,” his favoured and “peculiar people.” *The unjust judge was not interested* in granting her petition; but God’s honour is concerned in relieving the wants of his peopleⁱ. We may even address him in the language of holy David^k—“There was little hope of prevailing with such a *merciless and unjust judge*; but we have to go to a loving, and com-

^d ver. 4.

^f Eph. vi. 12.

ⁱ John xiv. 13.

^e ὤκιστά μὲν, obtundat me.

^g John xv. 5.

^k Ps. lxxiv. 22.

^h Matt. vii. 7, 8.

passionate Father¹. *The widow moreover had none to intercede for her; but we have a righteous and all-prevailing advocate^m. She was in danger of irritating the judge by her entreaties; but the more importunate we are, the more God is pleased with usⁿ. She, notwithstanding all her difficulties, obtained her request. How much more then shall we, who, in lieu of her difficulties, have such abundant encouragements! Surely this deduction is as consoling as it is plain and obvious, and our Lord, with peculiar earnestness, confirms it^o: nor can that be justly deemed tardy, which comes in the fittest season.]*

2. In a way of reproof—

There is but little of such importunity to be found; nor is this to be wondered at, since there is so little “*faith* on the earth”—

[Faith is that principle from whence earnest prayer proceeds. If we believe the declarations of God, we must feel ourselves weak and helpless: if we credit his promises, we shall acknowledge his readiness to help us: and if we believe the reality and importance of eternal things, we shall most earnestly seek help from God; nor shall we be unwilling to wait till he see fit to answer us. But how little is there of such *faith* in the world! How few are faithful to the convictions of their own conscience! How few maintain this holy constancy and fervour in prayer! How few can be truly called “a people nigh unto God!”]

If Christ should now come to judgment, would he find this faith in *us*?

[Some live without any acknowledgment of God in prayer: they seem to have forgotten that there will be a day of judgment: others engage stately in their accustomed round of duties, and satisfy themselves with an unmeaning recital of certain words. There are others also who under the pressure of affliction will cry to God, but are soon weary of a service in which they have no pleasure. Few, very few, it is to be feared, resemble the importunate widow. Few pray, as if they thoroughly believed the efficacy of prayer. If “Christ should now come, would he find faith” in *us*? He will surely inquire as well respecting our faith, as our works; and if we have not the faith that stimulates us to prayer, he will appoint us our portion with the unbelievers.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who live without prayer—

¹ Joel. ii. 13. ^m 1 John ii. 1. ⁿ Prov. xv. 8. Isai. lxxii. 7.

^o He first appeals to us, and then adds, “I tell you,” &c.

[Such persons are as devoid of reason as they are of piety. What madness is it to neglect heaven when it may be obtained by such means! And how will such thoughtless sinners ere long bewail their folly! We cannot but address them as the mariners did the sleeping prophet^p.—]

2. Those who pray only in a formal manner—

[Formal services are far from being pleasing and acceptable to God: they tend, for the most part, only to deceive our own souls. God requires us to worship him in spirit and in truth^q. Let us then remember the awful declaration of our Lord^r.—]

3. Those who, after praying for a season, become remiss again—

[See whether it be not the love of earthly things that hath hindered you. If so, repent and do your first works, and turn unto your God^s: but perhaps you faint merely through the discouragements you meet with^t. Let the remembrance of the importunate widow revive your hopes. Justify God, as the Psalmist did in similar circumstances^u, and renew your application to him in dependence on his gracious promise^v.]

4. Those that have received gracious answers to prayer—

[Let not the goodness of God to you become an occasion of pride. God was not first moved by any worthiness in your petitions; but he stirred you up to ask, because he had before determined to give. If this view of things be humiliating, it also affords much encouragement. Every believing prayer may be considered as a pledge of the blessings asked^w. Adopt therefore the pious resolution of the Psalmist^x—; so shall your prayers terminate in everlasting praises.]

^p Jonah i. 6.

^q John iv. 23, 24.

^r Mark vii. 6, 7.

^s Rev. ii. 5.

^t Ps. lxxvii. 7—9. Prov. xiii. 12.

^u Ps. xxii. 2, 3.

^v Hab. ii. 3.

^w Ps. vi. 9.

^x Ps. cxvi. 2.

MDLVIII.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

Luke xviii. 13, 14. *And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.*

MANY express their regret, that religion is so generally neglected; and doubtless, a considerate man cannot reflect upon it but with grief. But it is common also to substitute a formal and mistaken religion in the place of that which is spiritual and saving. Nor is there sufficient jealousy entertained on this subject. The Pharisees of old were extremely diligent in the observance of outward duties: but, while they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," they were as far from the kingdom of God as if they had been openly profane. For the conviction of such persons, our Lord contrasted, in a parable, the spirit of a self-righteous Pharisee with that of a repenting Publican. He represented them as engaged in prayer, which is a season when most of all they discover their true character. He then declared the very different acceptance they met with from God. In pursuance of our Lord's design, we will open more fully,

I. The different dispositions they manifested in prayer—

The Pharisee, with apparent devotion, gave thanks to God—

[The Pharisee might with propriety bless God for his preventing grace, and acknowledge with gratitude whatever God had wrought in him. Nor was it sinful to feel a pleasure in reviewing his past life. St. Paul, on proper occasions, spake of his disinterestedness and generosity^a. He thanked God also that he had laboured more than all the Apostles^b, and received much satisfaction in reflecting on his own integrity^c.]

But on a more attentive survey of his spirit we shall find him actuated by a most hateful disposition. Mark,

1. His pride—

[He came professedly with an intention to pray to God; but he was so full of his virtues that he forgot all his wants. His acknowledgment of God was manifestly no more than a mere compliment. His thanksgiving was one continued eulogium upon himself: yet, after all, his freedom from gross sins was but a small matter to boast of, and the duties he had practised were only the means of gratifying his vanity.]

^a Acts xx. 33, 34.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^c 2 Cor. i. 12.

2. His uncharitableness—

[Not satisfied with commending himself, he poured contempt on all others^d. He arrogantly presumed to judge the Publican in particular: but what concern had he with the state of other men? Their greater degrees of sinfulness could not make him less sinful: nor should it have been a subject of boast, but of lamentation. He should have taken occasion from it, not to insult over them, but to intercede for them: but the guilt and misery of his fellow-creatures were to him a source of gratification rather than of grief: nor did he care how many might perish, provided he could have the satisfaction of contemplating his own superior goodness.]

3. His self-dependence—

[He confessed no sins, because he thought he had none to confess; or that they were far overbalanced by his virtues. He implored no help, because he felt no need of divine assistance. He entertained no doubt of his own ability to do the will of God. The whole of his deportment shewed the thought of his heart to be, "In *myself* have I righteousness and strength."]

The Publican manifested a spirit altogether the reverse of this—

[He was of a profession that was generally and perhaps justly execrated^e: and it is probable he had yielded to the temptations that beset him; but now, "what had been sweet in his mouth, was become gall in his bowels."]

He approached God with deep *humility and contrition*—

[He came into the temple with a holy fear and trembling. While the Pharisee boldly walked up to the highest part, *he* stood, as it were, at the very threshold. While the Pharisee ostentatiously spread forth his hands, *he* did not presume to "lift up so much as his eyes" to heaven. Instead of boasting of his goodness, he humbled himself as "a sinner." He confessed himself to be deserving of God's wrath and indignation. With much anguish of spirit he "smote upon his breast," and cried for mercy as one who felt himself the chief of sinners.]

He placed all his *confidence in God* alone—

^d Οἱ λοιποὶ, the rest of the world.

^e The Publicans were tax-gatherers; and, under pretence of gathering the legal imposts, generally extorted more than was due: hence their very employment was held odious, and all who engaged in it were detested.

[He did not attempt to extenuate his guilt, or promise amendment as a reparation for his offences. He renounced all self-righteous methods of recommending himself to God, and cast himself entirely upon the Divine mercy.]

Services performed in so different a spirit could not find equal acceptance—

II. The different success with which their prayers were attended—

The Pharisee could not reasonably expect a blessing—

[Many humble persons indeed would envy his conscious rectitude, and wish that they could lay claim to such purity as his. But, what could he obtain who did not condescend to ask any thing? His *pride* would set God at a greater distance from him^f. Had he been able to boast of far greater things than he possessed, his *uncharitableness* had rendered them all of no value^g, and his *self-dependence* cut him off from all hope in the Divine mercy^h. Hence, though full of self-applause, he departed without a blessing from God. Though justified in his own conceit, he was under condemnation for sin. He was odious in God's eyes in proportion as he was amiable in his own. This is asserted, not in the text only, but in other passages of Scriptureⁱ—. Jehovah himself declares this in very significant and awful terms^k—.]

The Publican, on the contrary, was blessed beyond his expectation—

[Many would have reprobated his downcast look and solemn attitude, and have judged him to be a melancholy enthusiast or a designing hypocrite. But God regarded him with complacency and delight. Such *humility and contrition* could not fail of engaging his care^l; and such *affiance in him* obliged him, as it were, to display his mercy^m. Hence the Publican went home justified, while the Pharisee returned in a state of condemnationⁿ. Thus it is that God will deal with every humble suppliant^o. He will assuredly exalt us in proportion as we abase ourselves.]

^f Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^h Gal. v. 2, 4.

ⁱ Prov. xvi. 5.

^k Isai. lxxv. 5. Here the Pharisee's character is described in perfect correspondence with the text: and God's indignation against him is very strongly painted.

^l Isai. lvii. 15. Ps. li. 17.

^m Ps. cxxv. 1. Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

ⁿ This is the import of that which the text expresses in a way of comparison.

^o Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who trust in themselves that they are righteous—

[Almost all, when interrogated about their souls, reply as this Pharisee^p—. But we shall not stand or fall by a comparison with other men. If we have been free from some sins, we have committed many others; and if we have practised some duties, we have neglected many others. As sinners we must all humble ourselves like the Publican: nor is there a possibility of obtaining mercy in any other way^q.]

2. Those who are of a contemptuous spirit while they profess to believe in Christ—

[Many pride themselves on the knowledge of the Gospel, as the Pharisee did on his virtues, and speak as contemptuously of the unenlightened world as he did of the Publican. Conceited, arrogant, contentious, they make the Gospel itself an occasion of sin. Well did St. Paul reprove such persons in the Corinthian Church^r. Let them remember that humility and love are the very essence of religion; and beware, lest the higher they are exalted in privileges, the deeper they fall into destruction.]

3. Those who are low and vile in their own esteem—

[Never are you higher in God's esteem than when you are lowest in your own. Fear not but that they who trust in God's mercy shall find mercy at his hands. Let that faithful saying of the Apostle's sink deep into your hearts^s.—Look truly to the Saviour, and you may "go down to your house justified^t." To every believing penitent he speaks as he did to that repenting sinner^u.—]

^p "I am not the worst of sinners," &c. &c.

^q Prov. xxviii. 13. 1 John i. 8, 9. ^r 1 Cor. iii. 3. and iv. 7.

^s 1 Tim. i. 15.

^t Christ emphatically says, "I say unto you," &c.

^u Luke vii. 48, 50.

MDLIX.

CHRIST FORETELLS HIS OWN SUFFERINGS.

Luke xviii. 31—34. *Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles. and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated*

and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

WE are informed respecting some of the heathen philosophers, that they had a doctrine for the vulgar, and a different doctrine for their own immediate disciples. Not so our blessed Lord; he had the same doctrine for all: but he communicated some things more plainly to his select followers, because they had, by reason of their constant attendance upon him, a clearer conception of his meaning, and because they were afterwards to become the instructors of the world. Hence we find that he explained to them in private what he had spoken to the public in parables: and in these private, no less than in his public, instructions, he was indefatigable; embracing every opportunity, whether when sitting in the house, or when walking by the way. He was now walking with his Disciples towards Jerusalem; and, as his death was speedily approaching, he judged it right to apprise them what they were to expect. He knew how great a stumbling-block his sufferings were likely to prove to those who did not understand the reason and necessity of them; and therefore he determined once more to inform them, that the sufferings were not unexpected casualties, but events foreseen by him and fore-ordained by God.

In this passage there are two things to be noticed;

I. The minuteness of our Lord's prophecy—

We can scarcely conceive a prophecy to be more circumstantial than that before us: and in this view it reflects peculiar light on,

1. His character as a man—

[The particular sufferings here specified are most terrible to flesh and blood: yet behold, he speaks of them with as much composure as if they were light and insignificant. But in regarding them with such indifference, he shewed how undaunted was his *fortitude*, how ardent his *zeal*, how unquenchable his *love*. Previous to his specifying these things, when he did but manifest a readiness to go up to Jerusalem, where the

Jews of late had sought to stone him, his Disciples were amazed at his intrepidity, and trembled for themselves lest they also should be involved in difficulties through him^a: and, if they were so agitated with a *confused* apprehension of *probable* evils, how great must his resolution have been, who saw every trouble *distinct* and *certain*, and yet went forward boldly to meet it all! But he had undertaken to glorify his Father upon earth, and to open a way for the display of all his perfections in the salvation of fallen man; and he would not go back: yea, foreseeing what a "bloody baptism he had to be baptized with, he was quite straitened till it should be accomplished." The only alternative was, to bear the sins of men in his own body, or to leave them to perish under the wrath of God: and though he knew how dreadful that wrath was, and that, if not borne by him as their surety, they must bear it for ever, he went forward a willing sacrifice, and "gave himself up for us an offering to God of a sweet-smelling savour." These heavenly virtues, I say, are all heightened by the consideration, that he had a distinct view of the indignities that were to be offered to him, and the miseries that he was to endure; and his prophetic enumeration of them discovers and illustrates the unrivalled excellencies of his character.]

2. His office as the Messiah—

[What clearer proof could be given of his Messiahship? Two questions I would put to any one that doubts the Messiahship of Jesus; and I will defy all the infidels upon earth to answer them: *Could any impostor foresee such events?* or, *Would any impostor rest his pretensions on the accomplishment of them?* We may conceive an impostor to foresee, that he shall be treated with much indignity, and that he shall be put to death: I say, he may see so great a probability of these things, as that he shall venture to predict them: but the circumstances foretold by our Lord are beyond the sphere of probability. Compare the account of this prophecy as it is related in the text, and by St. Matthew^b: Jesus foretells that he was to be betrayed, and "delivered up into the hands of the Chief Priests and Scribes;" that he was to undergo the formality of a trial, and "be condemned" by a judicial sentence: that he should then not be put to death by them, but "be delivered unto the Gentiles," and by them be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit on: that by them also he should be scourged; and after that should "be crucified" as a slave. Now the probability was, that he would be tumultuously stoned to death by the Jews; because that was the punishment

^a Compare John xi. 7, 8, 16, 37. with Mark x. 32. He "*went before*:" they "*amazed*, and *afraid*."

^b Matt. xx. 18, 19.

annexed to the crime of which they accused him, namely, blasphemy; and because they had repeatedly attempted to stone him before. As for the Jews delivering him up to the Romans, particularly after the Roman Governor had given them leave to "take and judge him according to their law," it was highly improbable, considering how jealous the Jews were of the Roman power, and how much they hated it. But supposing him delivered up to the Romans, what reason was there to think that he should be insulted by *them*, and in the *precise manner* which he described? But why should they "scourge" him? or, if he must be scourged, why must he be put to death, and *that* too the death of a slave? No other persons were scourged and crucified too: and the fact is, that Pilate ordered him to be scourged in order to *prevent* his crucifixion: he hoped, that the *Jews*, when they saw how severely he had been scourged, would have been satisfied to let him go: and it was nothing but a most singular concurrence of most implacable enmity on their part, and most shameful cowardice on his, that produced the accomplishment of the whole prophecy. I ask then again, Could any impostor foresee such events? or rather, must not he who did foresee them be endued with a divine prescience, that proved him incontestably to have been sent from God?

But supposing for argument sake that an impostor might guess at these things, and venture to predict them; would any impostor rest his pretensions on the accomplishment of such events as these? Though he might foretell many indignities to be offered him, would he predict his death, and so cruel a death as that of the cross, when he would thereby be precluded from reaping any benefit from his imposture, and be hurried into the eternal world to answer for his deceit at the tribunal of his God? Would any man in his senses act such a part as this? But if we could suppose it possible that a man should be so under the influence of vanity, as to sacrifice his present and eternal welfare for the purpose of leaving a name behind him, and being followed by survivors as a founder of a sect, would he be mad enough to give out, as our Lord did, that he "would rise again the third day?" Would he fix on a test which in so short a time should prove his imposture, and expose him to the scorn and derision of the whole world? They who can believe that any impostor would do this, have no cause to complain of any thing incredible in the sacred oracles; for all the difficulties that can be found in the whole scheme of Christianity, are nothing in comparison of this, no, not worthy of a thought.

Besides, our blessed Lord speaks of "all these things as written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man;" so that *they* also, living at the distance of many hundred years from

him, and from each other, must have been confederate with him, if he was an impostor: but, if this could not be, then does this circumstantial prediction of his sufferings and resurrection, accomplished as it was in every minute particular, prove beyond a doubt, that he was the true Messiah.]

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. The dulness of his Disciples in comprehending it—

Nothing could be plainer than his words: there are no figures, no metaphors, no parabolical expressions; all is clear, plain, literal, explicit. Whence then was it that the Disciples could “not understand these things; that this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken?” The truth is, they were blinded,

1. By their prejudice—

[They had, in common with their nation at large, formed a notion that the Messiah was to be a temporal Prince, and not only to liberate them from the Roman yoke, but to establish an universal empire upon earth: and as the things which Jesus predicted were altogether irreconcilable with those ideas, they could not at all receive his word, or comprehend his meaning. He had often repeated the same truths to them: but still they could not understand him. Now it is owing to this cause that the Gospel is so little understood at this day. Men have formed pre-conceived notions of religion; and, because they do not find them confirmed by the sacred writers, they cannot receive even the plainest declarations of God himself. The current idea of religion is, that ‘we are imperfect creatures, needing some amendment; yet, provided we are not grossly immoral, we have nothing to fear: if we are sober and honest, and just and charitable, and approve ourselves good members of society, God will readily pardon our little imperfections; and whatever is wanting to recommend us to his favour, Jesus Christ will supply. These are the views almost universally adopted, and the sentiments that are maintained, wherever religion is made the subject of conversation. Now when persons, possessed of these ideas, hear that we are altogether corrupt and abominable, and justly exposed to the curse and wrath of God for our innumerable violations of his law, they cannot tell what we mean: we appear to them to be misrepresenting and libelling human nature. When they hear that we must be created anew in Christ Jesus, and “be renewed in the spirit of our minds,” that “old things must pass away, and all things must become new,” and that “except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,”

they have no idea what it is that we mean; but without much inquiry they take for granted that these are some gloomy or extravagant notions of wild enthusiasts. When they hear that we must "flee to Christ for refuge," just as the man who had accidentally slain a person fled to the city of refuge from the pursuer of blood; and that, if we do not actually get our souls washed in his blood, we must eternally perish; we seem to them to be alarming men without necessity, and to be discouraging the practice of good works. So also, when they hear that we are to devote ourselves altogether unto God, "living not to ourselves but unto him," and "walking in all things as Christ walked," we appear to them to be requiring a degree of sanctity that is not to be attained, and that is incompatible with the common offices of life. Their own notions are so deeply rooted in their minds, and they pay so little attention to any thing spoken in the Scriptures, that they cannot conceive how sentiments so different from those which they have imbibed, can possibly be true.

To counteract this fatal evil, I would earnestly entreat all to lay aside their pre-conceived notions, and to come to the sacred volume, not as critics to sit in judgment upon God, but as little children to be instructed by him: on opening that blessed book, we should lift up our hearts to God, and pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."]

2. By their worldliness—

[It is surprising to what an extent the love of this world yet predominated in the hearts of the Apostles. One would have supposed, that now at least for a few moments they should lose sight of their ambitious projects, and turn their minds to higher objects of pursuit: but not all that our Lord had said respecting his own sufferings, had in the least damped their expectations of worldly good: for St. Matthew tells us, that "THEN came James and John, with their Mother Salome, uniting their requests, that these two might be the chief ministers in his kingdom:" and the other ten Apostles, instead of pitying them for their folly, were filled with indignation against them, for endeavouring to secure posts of honour, which they were equally entitled to, and equally ambitious to attain.* Can we wonder that, in such a state of mind as this, they could not comprehend what our Lord spoke about his sufferings and death?

Here again we see whence it is that men are so slow of heart to receive the self-denying truths of the Gospel. We call men to renounce the world, to "come out from it," to "be

* Matt. xx. 19, 20, 21, 24.

crucified to it," to consider themselves altogether as "pilgrims and sojourners in it," and to "have their conversation in heaven:" but how can they comply with such exhortations as these? We tell them, that if they will be Christ's disciples, they must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow him: we tell them, that they must be conformed to him in sufferings, if ever they will be partakers with him in glory: but how can they endure such doctrines who are looking for wealth and honour and ease as the great sources of their happiness in life? "How can they believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?" We have a remarkable illustration of this truth in the conduct of the Pharisees: our Lord had told them that they "could not serve God and Mammon:" and immediately it is recorded of them, that "*being covetous, they derided him*."^d What! was there any thing absurd in our Lord's declarations? No: but the Pharisees were reduced to the necessity of condemning either themselves or him: themselves they would not condemn, because they were determined not to renounce their covetous desires; and therefore they condemned him as a weak, foolish enthusiast. Thus it is with worldlings in every age and place. Not but that they see more than they are willing to confess; but that, "being averse to receive the truth, God gives them over to their own delusions, till at last they believe their own lie^e."

How then shall this evil be counteracted? Let us be aware that there is a bias within us, and that Satan makes use of our corruptions to blind our eyes and to harden our hearts. Let us beg of God to take the veil from our hearts, and so to irradiate our minds with divine knowledge, that we shall be constrained to "receive the truth in the love thereof."]

From hence arise two obvious and important QUESTIONS:

1. What know I of Christ?

[We have certainly in some respects the advantage of the Apostles during the time of Christ's continuance on earth; because we have clearer light given us, and fewer prejudices to contend with. We therefore, as far as respects our speculative views of Christianity, are better instructed than they. But wherein do we differ from them in their *practical* views? Are we not as blind to the spiritual nature of the Gospel as they? We see indeed that Christ has suffered; but do we see the *necessity* of those sufferings for *our* salvation, and the *sufficiency* of them for the salvation of *the whole world*? Or, if we do see these truths *notionally*, do we view them as the life,

^d Luke xvi. 14.

^e 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

the soul, the essence of all religion? Do we live upon them, and glory in them, from day to day? — — — Before we can know them *thus*, we must be “taught of God:” the Lord Jesus himself must “open our understandings,” as he did those of his Disciples: and the Holy Ghost must “shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” We must “receive the Spirit which is of God, before we can know the things that are freely given to us of God.”]

2. What am I doing for Christ?

[Surely, if he so willingly gave himself up to sufferings *for me*, I am not afraid of sufferings *for him*; I am ready to “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” He has told me, that, if I will be faithful to him, the world will hate me as it hated him, and persecute me as it persecuted him. Do these predictions alarm me? and, when I see them fulfilled in others, do I study how I may avoid the accomplishment of them in my own case? Surely, if my heart were right with him, I should be willing to receive him on his own terms, and to follow him in his own way; and, if called to suffer for him, I should “rejoice that I am counted worthy to do so.” Is this then my spirit? and is it my one wish, desire, and labour, that “Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or death?” O! that we all might be able to appeal to God, that this is indeed our daily experience! Let us remember, that Christ not only died, but *rose again*, according to his predictions; and then the shame of his cross was for ever rolled away. So shall it be with us; we may be persecuted for his sake even unto death; but in the resurrection, our crown of glory shall be proportionably bright: let us be contented therefore to “suffer with him, that we may reign with him;” and, in spite of men and devils, let us endeavour to glorify him here, that we may hereafter be glorified with him in a better world.]

† 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11, 14. and 2 Cor. iv. 6.

MDLX.

THE CONVERSION OF ZACCHEUS.

Luke xix. 9. *And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house.*

IT is said of our blessed Lord, that “he went about doing good.” But the good which he did was principally to the bodies of men; the work of converting

and saving their souls was to be carried on principally after his death by the instrumentality of his Apostles. There were, however, some instances, wherein he wrought effectually to the conversion of men's souls. At the time of his death, the number of his Disciples amounted to about five hundred. Amongst that happy number was Zaccheus, of whose conversion we are informed in the passage before us.

Zaccheus was a rich Publican, or tax-gatherer: having heard much of the fame of Jesus, he was desirous to see him; but, being small of stature, he could not easily accomplish his wish: he therefore ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree, near which Jesus was about to pass; and thus secured the desired gratification. But, to his utter surprise, Jesus called him down from the tree, invited himself as a guest to his house, and, as the event proved, converted and saved his soul.

Now in this history we see,

I. In what way salvation is imparted—

Doubtless there is a great diversity in the experience of different people: some are called to the knowledge of Christ more suddenly, others more gradually; some with deeper convictions of their guilt and danger, and others in a more easy and placid way: but in some things all are agreed: to whomsoever salvation comes, it is in the first instance,

1. Unmerited—

[It is evident that Zaccheus did not merit salvation: he was an unjust and oppressive man; and though he might not deserve such opprobrium as the Jews cast upon him, as though he were the vilest of characters, yet it is plain, from his own acknowledgment, that he had availed himself of the power vested in him by the Romans, to extort more than by the laws he was entitled to; and he had thereby considerably augmented his own wealth. But if no such conduct could have been imputed to him, yet must salvation have been to him an unmerited gift: for, as sinners, we all deserve the wrath of God: and they who deserve his wrath, certainly cannot deserve his favour. "If we had done all that is commanded us, we should still be unprofitable servants;" and therefore we must for ever renounce

all idea of merit, and look for salvation as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus.]

2. Unsolicited—

[We read not of any application that Zaccheus made to Jesus: on the contrary, Jesus prevented him with the blessings of his goodness. It is thus with all of us in the first communication of grace to the soul: as the prophet says, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not." I do not say, that, when grace is imparted to the soul, we shall not pray: for we certainly shall wait upon God in fervent supplication; and on this is suspended all our hope of divine blessings: "we must ask, and seek, and knock, if we would have the door of mercy opened to us." But this, I say, that, in the first instance, previously to the communication of divine grace to the soul, we do not pray for it: but God imparts it of his own mind and will. We are like Lazarus in the grave, till God speaks the word, and says, Come forth: nor do we ever begin to pray, till God of his own grace and mercy has given us "a spirit of grace and of supplication."]

3. Unthought of—

[Zaccheus' mind was as much as ever set upon his wealth; and his only view in wishing to see Jesus, was to gratify his curiosity. Nothing was further from his thoughts than the idea of becoming a stated follower of Christ, and an heir of his salvation. Thus does God still "bring the blind by a way that they know not, and lead them in paths that they have not known." By his Providence he leads persons into such situations and circumstances as shall be favourable for the communication of his grace. Little did Zaccheus imagine what would be the result of his climbing up into the tree, or what God intended, when he inclined his mind to adopt such a measure for the gratifying of his curiosity: and little do many think, when God leads them to this or that place, or visits them with this or that affliction, what the issue of it will be: but God, who sees the end from the beginning, so orders all events, that the purposes of his grace towards his chosen people may be accomplished.

That this is a just view of the subject we cannot doubt, when we are told, that "God is the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift;" and "that he gives us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If holy desires and purposes originated first with ourselves, we should have whereof to glory: but since the first desire after salvation is no less the gift of God than salvation itself, the whole praise of it, from first to last, must be given to God alone.

In this part of our subject we wish not to be misunderstood: we do not say, that the parallel between Zaccheus and others holds good in *the suddenness* of his conversion: for though God *may* convert persons as suddenly now, as he did in the days of old, we apprehend that conversion in these days is, for the most part, gradual and progressive. But, with respect to the first imparting of the divine life to the soul, we conceive that there is no difference between him and us: it is alike in all cases, unmerited, unsolicited, unthought of.]

The resemblance between his salvation and ours may be yet further seen,

II. In the manner in which it operates—

Exceeding different were the effects produced,

1. On the receiver—

[No sooner had the grace of Christ wrought effectually on the heart of Zaccheus, than he approved himself indeed to be a child of Abraham.

Behold the change wrought in him *in reference to Christ*. Before, he had no regard for Christ: but now he came down gladly, and received him joyfully to his house, and accounted an intercourse with him as the most desirable of all blessings. See the change also *in reference to his fellow-creatures*. Before, he had disregarded all the duties both of justice and mercy; and now he set himself to 'the diligent performance of them. Had he wronged any person, either by false accusation, or in any other way? he would now make restitution even four-fold, or to the utmost demands of the law*. Had he overlooked the necessities of the poor? he would, from this moment, consecrate to their service one half of his possessions.

Here we see the invariable effects of grace upon the soul: it will change all our dispositions and conduct: it will make us to delight ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to desire above all things the advancement of his glory. It will make us also to fill up in a very different way our duties in society. Instead of leaving us under the influence of covetous practices and selfish passions, it will cause us to seek our happiness in diffusing happiness around us: it will never suffer us to rest till we have made restitution to all whom we may have injured, and to undo (as far as possible) all the evil we have done; and it will lead us to do in all things as we would in a change of circumstances have others do to us.]

2. On the beholders—

[One would have supposed, that, on seeing such a change wrought on a notorious sinner, all who beheld it should

* Exod. xxii. 1.

magnify the grace of Christ, and admire his condescension to one who was so generally detested. But the spectators were filled rather with spleen and envy; and took occasion to pour contempt on Zaccheus, on account of his past character, and to murmur against Jesus for going to be a guest with him. It was thus that the elder brother in the parable was indignant at his father's reception of the Prodigal Son: he would not so much as own him for a brother: but said to his father, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this *thy son* was come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." And thus it is whenever any conversion takes place, especially among the profligate, and still more if they be rich: it is always made by the proud Pharisee an occasion of pouring contempt on the converts themselves, and of venting his indignation against the Gospel of Christ. Thus is the very grace of Christ, no less than the exhibition of it in the Gospel, "a savour of life unto life to some, and to others a savour of death unto death."]

OBSERVATIONS—

1. How desirable it is to be found attending on God's ordinances—

[It is there, if we may so speak, that Jesus passes by; and there that we may expect to get a sight of him. But when he will be pleased to reveal himself to us, we know not. This however we know, that, whensoever that blessed event shall take place, it will richly repay us for all the efforts we have made. That difficulties may sometimes lie in our way, is probable enough; but we should not too easily yield to them. The difficulty that presented itself to Zaccheus, was real: he was small of stature, and could not get a sight of Jesus for "the press" that surrounded him. But this put him on the use of an expedient, by which he succeeded. So we, if we were intent upon it, might often overcome the obstacles that oppose our attendance on divine ordinances. There is "a press" of company or of business that obstructs our way: but we may run away from it, or go before it, or by various means avoid it: and, if we are in earnest to get a sight of him, we may reasonably hope that he will not suffer us to be disappointed. Many who have come hither from no better motive than curiosity, have found salvation unexpectedly brought home to their souls: how much more may this blessed effect be hoped for, if we come to seek salvation itself! Let us hope then, that *this is the day* appointed in the Divine counsels for the communication of life to our souls: and that the grace which triumphed so gloriously in the conversion of Zaccheus,

shall now be magnified towards us. If only our souls be willing to receive Christ, we are authorized to say, "*This is the day.*" Nay, more; the very thing which was imputed to him as a fault, he will do again, as often as he is invited; "he will come and be — — guest with a man that is a *sinner.*"]

2. How happy are they to whose conversion the ordinances are made effectual—

[That very day and hour that the soul is converted unto God "salvation" comes to it: and who can ever justly appreciate the import of that word? To speak of salvation in its full extent, would lead us too far. View it only in its *present* effects.

How happy was Zaccheus rendered in his own soul! From that moment his heart was filled with joys to which he had been before an utter stranger. Now he felt that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," that "joy that is unspeakable and glorified" — — — Many would have envied him as a rich sinner: but his state was far more enviable when he was a saint, and stripped of half his wealth, or even if he had lost the whole that he possessed.

What a source of happiness also did he now become to all around him! To "*his house,*" as well as to himself, did "salvation come:" for who would receive it in his own soul, and not endeavour to communicate it to all connected with him? — — — To *them* also who transacted business with him did the benefit extend. He would no longer oppress them, as he had formerly done, but act agreeably to the dictates of strict justice. He would sooner lose all his gains, and be reduced to poverty, than enrich himself by extortion. And what a comfort arose *to the poor!* These had derived but little good hitherto from his opulence: but henceforth they were sure to find him the kindest friend. At one single gift, the half of his property was consecrated to their relief; and doubtless they would, together with pecuniary aid, receive from him also the benefit of his advice.

Behold, then, what happiness resulted from this one instance of conversion! Doubtless, the angels in heaven rejoiced at it: and well may every such change be a ground of praise and thanksgiving to all who behold it. Let proud Pharisees "*murmur,*" if they will: but let us bless God for every such communication of his grace, and pray that such converts may be multiplied throughout the world.]

MDLXI.

THE END FOR WHICH THE SON OF MAN CAME.

Luke xix. 10. *The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

ONE would imagine that all should be pleased with the conversion of notorious sinners : but it too often excites indignation rather than pleasure in the breasts of proud Pharisees. Zaccheus was a tax-gatherer, and most probably, like the rest in that line, was addicted to rapacity and extortion, though, perhaps, not in so great a degree as some others. He having a curiosity to see Jesus, and not being able, on account of the smallness of his stature, ran before, and climbed up into a tree near which Jesus was about to pass. Our blessed Lord in an instant converted his soul ; and, calling him down from the tree, went home to dine with him. This, it seems, gave great offence to the Pharisees, who could not endure to see such a distinguishing favour conferred on so worthless a character. But our Lord vindicated his own conduct, by alleging that, however sinful Zaccheus might be, he was a descendant of Abraham ; and that the very intent of his own advent in the flesh, was to seek and to save that which was lost.

To elucidate these comfortable words, we shall shew,

I. Who this Son of man is—

This, to those who beheld him in the flesh, was no easy matter to determine* : but to us it is clear as the light. Let us consult,

1. What Jesus has said of himself—

[He tells us that “ the Son does whatsoever the Father does ;” “ quickens whom he will, even as the Father does ;” “ has all judgment committed to him ;” is to be “ honoured

* When he spoke of his approaching crucifixion, and yet of drawing all men to himself, his hearers could not conceive how such opposite things could be affirmed of the same person, the one indicating him to be a man, the other to be a God. Hence they ask him, “ Who is this Son of man ?” John xii. 32—34.

even as the Father is; yea, that the Father is not honoured unless *he* also be honoured:" that he will "raise the dead by his voice:" that he "hath life in himself even as the Father has;" and "has authority to execute judgment also, BECAUSE HE IS THE SON OF MAN^b." Here he calls himself "the Son," "the Son of God," "the Son of man," evidently shewing, that these different names were of the same import, and that, notwithstanding he was a man, he possessed, and exercised, a divine power.

He speaks of the Son of man as existing in heaven before his incarnation^c, before the world was made^d, and even while, in his human nature, he was on earth^e.

He declared that the Son of man had a power to dispense with the Sabbath^f, and even to forgive sins^g; and when accused of being guilty of blasphemy for arrogating such power to himself, he reasserted his claim to that divine prerogative, and wrought a miracle in confirmation of it. Finally, he foretold that "the Son of man would come again in *his own* glory, with *his* holy angels^h:" and he bade his Disciples "watch and pray, that they might be *worthy to stand before* the Son of manⁱ."

Put these words into the mouth of Peter, or Paul, or any *creature*, however exalted, and they will appear arrogant, and blasphemous, in the extreme.]

2. What his Disciples have said of him—

[The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "When God bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him:" and again, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever:" and again, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest *him* a little (or, for a little time) lower than the angels^k." What can all this mean, but that he was infinitely superior to angels in his pre-existent state, but was made lower than them for a little while, for the great purposes of our redemption?

But St. Peter speaks in terms that cannot well be misunderstood. Our Lord put this question to his Disciples; "Whom do men say that I, *the Son of man*, am? And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, some Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord immediately

^b John v. 19—27.

^c John vi. 62.

^d John xvii. 5.

^e John iii. 13.

^f Mark ii. 28.

^g Luke v. 20—24.

^h Matt. xxv. 31.

ⁱ Luke xxi. 36.

^k Heb. i. 6, 8. and ii. 6, 7.

replied, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven¹." Now, if Peter meant only to say that he was a good man, or a prophet, what was there in that which he might not see and know without any particular revelation of it to his soul?

St. Stephen is yet more strong and decisive: for when he was "full of the Holy Ghost," he said, "I see the heavens opened, and the *Son of man* standing at the right hand of God:" upon which his hearers, filled with indignation, stoned him, calling upon God, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit^m." Now is it not utterly unaccountable, that a man full of the Holy Ghost, when favoured with a vision of God, and of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, should, in the very hour of death, address himself to Jesus, and not unto the Father, and *that* too almost in the very words that Jesus himself had used when addressing his heavenly Father, if Jesus were not higher than any created being? If he did not see that the Son of man was also the Son of God, yea, "God over all, equal with the Father, he was deservedly stoned to death, as the vilest blasphemer that ever lived upon the earth.

Who can see the Disciples of our Lord paying him such honour, and doubt what ideas they annexed to that lowly title, "the Son of man?"

3. What his enemies said of him—

[There can be no doubt but that *they* understood the terms "Son of man," and, "Son of God," to be equivalent, and that, when used in their highest sense, they denoted equality with God himself. When our Lord stood before the supreme council of the Jews, he said to them, "Hereafter shall *the Son of man* sit on the right hand of the power of God." Upon which they all exclaimed, Art thou then *the Son of God*? to which he answered, "Ye say truly, that I amⁿ."

On another occasion we are told, that the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also, "that God was his Father, *making himself equal with God^o*."

But the strongest testimony of all is, that his enemies actually put him to death for calling himself the Son of man. When the witnesses that appeared against him agreed not in their testimony, the high-priest asked him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see *the Son of man* sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." In these words he evidently

¹ Matt. xvi. 13—17.

ⁿ Luke xxii. 69, 70.

^m Acts vii. 56, 59.

^o John v. 18.

referred to that glorious prophecy of Daniel, where *the Son of man* is represented as receiving from the Father an universal and everlasting dominion². Instantly the high-priest rent his clothes, and said, "What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be worthy of death³." Now, if the name "*Son of man*" did not import that he was God also, why did not our Lord rectify their mistake, and inform them that he did not intend to arrogate divine honour to himself, or to insinuate that he was any more than a common prophet? By this he would have invalidated in an instant the charge of blasphemy, and have obliged them either to release him, or to find some other pretext for putting him to death. But our Lord knew that they were right in their interpretation of his words; and therefore he submitted in silence to the sentence that was dictated by their blind infuriated zeal⁴.]

It will be found an easier task to shew,

II. For what purpose he came into the world—

In our Lord's assertion respecting this, we cannot fail to notice,

1. The humiliating description which he gives of the human race—

[Every living man is characterized by this description, "*That which was lost.*" All are "*by nature* children of wrath⁵:" and *by practice* they have aggravated their guilt and condemnation a thousand-fold. To understand the full import of this word, "*LOST*," let us reflect on the state of those that are already in hell, their guilt, their condemnation by the law, their banishment from the Divine presence, their inconceivable and irremediable misery, then we shall see *our own* state, with this only difference; that *we* are yet on mercy's ground, and may have our sentence reversed, and our misery prevented; whereas *they* are gone beyond redemption: *they* are criminals already executed; and *we* are under the same sentence, uncertain whether we shall not the very next hour be called forth for execution, but with a pardon offered us on certain terms. O that we could realize this awful thought! — —]

² Dan. vii. 13, 14.

³ Mark xiv. 61—64.

⁴ Thus it fully appears that "*the Son of man*" is none other than "*God manifest in the flesh.*" And though there are many passages that more *directly* prove this *point*, yet are these peculiarly strong, inasmuch as they prove the *divinity* of Christ from things which are spoken of him under that title, which most of all denotes his *humanity*.

⁵ Eph. ii. 3.

2. The explicit declaration which he makes of the intent of his coming—

[We should never have sought him: we are like a *lost* sheep, that never traces back its steps to the fold it has deserted. He therefore came to "*seek*" us. However solicitous we had been to avert the wrath of God, we never could have done it by any means within our own power. He therefore came to "*save*" us; to save us by his blood from the guilt of our sins; to save us by his Spirit from the power and pollution of them.

To form a just idea of our state by means of his advent, let us once more consider the state of those in hell. Let us suppose that he went down to hell itself, and there proclaimed liberty and salvation to those who would believe in him: the state of his auditors there would exactly represent our state: and if we do not take the same interest in the glad tidings that they would, it is because we do not *feel* ourselves so utterly *lost* as we really are.

But whether we will believe it or not, this is our state, and to deliver us from it was the great end of his advent. It was for this, that the Son of God humbled himself to become a son of man; and, if we will believe in him, he will exalt us children of men, that we may be "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*."]

APPLICATION^u—

1. To those who deny that they are utterly lost and undone—

[Produce one person that is not wholly lost, and we will shew you one that has nothing to do with Christ, any more than Satan himself has. It was only them that are *lost* that Christ came to seek and save. Let proud self-justifying sinners consider this.]

2. To those who desire to obtain salvation—

[The person that came to seek and save you was fully equal to the task. He was God as well as man; and therefore there can be no want of efficacy in his blood to pardon, or in his grace to sanctify, you. Trust in him, and he will prove himself able to save you to the very uttermost.]

* John i. 12.

^u The latter part of the subject is so plain and easy, that the youngest minister can be at no loss to illustrate it.

MDLXII.

THE POUNDS.

Luke xix. 12, 13. *A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.*

MANKIND are prone to amuse themselves with prospects of earthly grandeur, and to neglect the most important ends and purposes of life. The Jews were expecting their Messiah to erect a temporal kingdom; the Disciples themselves also were led away by this fond conceit. At our Lord's last ascent to Jerusalem, this expectation prevailed amongst all orders and ranks of men^a. To rectify their notions and turn their attention to their proper concerns, he delivered to them this parable^b. Christ is the person here intended by the nobleman; he has committed to every man something which is to be improved for him; and he is shortly coming at the day of judgment to reckon with us. These points are so clear that we need insist on them only in a way of APPLICATION—

I. Has not Christ given us something to improve for him?

[We are ready enough to fix a high value on what we possess, when we think it will reflect honour on ourselves: but we are apt to think lightly of it, when we are reminded of the responsibility connected with it. Few indeed have great talents or extensive influence; but every person has at least a pound^c committed to him. Have we not, in the first place, been endued with *reason*? This surely is capable of great improvement. Have we not also enjoyed many *sabbaths* and *ordinances*? These might have been turned to a good account for God. Have we not also had access to the *Holy Scriptures*?

^a ver. 11.

^b The parable states, that a nobleman, having been invested with royal dignity, reckoned with his servants to whom he had committed money, and punished the citizens who had refused submission to his authority. These being perfectly distinct, we shall treat them separately, and confine our attention at present to the former.

^c The value of the mina is not ascertained: some think it was equal to about *three* guineas; others, that it was rather more than *five*.

From these we might have learned all the mysteries of godliness. We should therefore have studied them with all humility and diligence. Have we not experienced many *convictions of conscience*, and gracious *operations of God's Spirit*? These are inestimable, and may be made subservient to our eternal welfare. Have we not received many *calls and warnings* from God in his *Providence*? These, if duly attended to, might have been occasions of much good to our souls: and all these things are mercies, of which we must hereafter give an account.]

II. What improvement have we made of his favours?—

[The injunction given to all, is, "Occupy, that is, Trade, till I come;" and all these things are given us to be improved for God^d. What use then have we made of the pound committed to us? Have we employed our *reason* in search of Divine truth? Have we spent our *Sabbaths* in meditation and prayer? Have we profited by the *ordinances* as we might have done? Have we taken the *Scriptures* as a guide to our feet and lantern to our path? Have we obeyed the dictates of *conscience*, and the motions of God's *Spirit*? Have we laid to heart the various dispensations of *Providence* which we observed in our own concerns, and in the world around us? Have we, in short, laboured to improve our *time*, our *money*, our *influence* for him who has entrusted them to our care? Have we laboured earnestly to fulfil that apostolic injunction^e—?]

III. What excuse have we for neglecting to improve them?—

[The slothful servant cast the blame upon his lord: nor are there wanting amongst ourselves those who resemble him. We say, God requires more than he will enable us to perform: but can this be affirmed with even a shadow of truth? Do not his promises extend to all our wants? May not every one adopt the words of the Apostle Paul^f—? Even if this assertion were true, it would not justify our supineness. The more "austere" our Lord were, the more we should fear to provoke him: we should endeavour at least to approve ourselves to him as we could. If we could not do *all*, it is no reason that we should do *nothing*. If we could not improve his money by trading, we should "put it into the bank." Our excuses then will only turn to our confusion. God will justly say to us, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee."]

IV. What recompence have we reason to expect?—

[Our Lord will reward every man according to his works. Are we ready then to give up our account to him? Can we

^d 1 Cor. xii. 7.

^e 1 Pet. iv. 10.

^f Phil. iv. 13.

say, "Lord, thy pound hath gained *ten*, or *five* pounds?" Can we say upon good grounds that it hath gained even *two*? Happy for us, if we have the testimony of our conscience respecting this. We shall gladly, like the good servants, ascribe the honour to our Lord^s: we shall adopt the language of the Apostle^h—, and of David^l—: nor will our Lord be backward to reward our faithful exertions. He will recompense every one in proportion to his labour and success^k; and to every one he will give what infinitely exceeds the value of his services^l. But, alas! are there not many who have hid their money in a napkin? What recompence then must such slothful servants receive? Christ will shortly deprive them of *the means of grace* they possess, and make them monuments of his everlasting displeasure: nor will this be the reward of those only who *dissipate* his money: it will be the certain recompence of *unprofitableness*. Let not any one therefore hope to be approved while he continues idle: let not any one be satisfied with mere negative holiness: let our exertions in our Master's service be unwearied: let us, like the saints of old, look to the recompence of reward^m: and let us stand ready to give up our account with joy. So shall we have confidence before him, and not be ashamed at his comingⁿ.]

^s They do not say *I* have gained, but, "*Thy pound*" hath gained: they knew and acknowledged that they had *nothing of their own* to trade with.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^l 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^l The government of five or ten cities is a rich compensation indeed for the improvement of one pound.

^m Heb. xi. 26.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 28.

MDLXIII.

THE REBELLIOUS CITIZENS.

Luke xix. 12, 14. *A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return—But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.*

THERE is scarcely any one to be found who does not imagine he loves God. Men form erroneous notions of the Deity, and then approve of him as corresponding with their views of his character. But, if all his attributes were faithfully set before them, they would rather turn from him with hatred and disgust. The Jews conceived, that, when their Messiah should

come, they should all be ready to welcome his arrival. But, when he really did come, and declared that his kingdom was not of this world, they poured contempt upon him, and persecuted him unto death. To shew them this conduct of theirs was foreseen, our blessed Lord advertised them of it before it came to pass. And, to rectify their views, spake to them the parable before us.

“The nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom,” represented our Lord Jesus Christ—

[We are not to look for any hidden meaning in the title here given him: but it was well suited to the Lord Jesus as *the only-begotten Son of God*^a. His journey “to a far country to receive a kingdom,” to us appears dark; but to a Jew, it would be exceeding clear and apposite. The ecclesiastical and civil governors were at that time appointed by the Roman emperor; and were frequently sent for, either to be confirmed in their authority, or to answer for their abuse of it. This was well known to the Jewish nation; so that, as applied to the Messiah, the allusion would appear both obvious and elegant. The Lord Jesus, though he was a king from the very hour of his birth (for he was “born King of the Jews”), never assumed any thing of royal dignity, but lived in so mean a condition, that sometimes “he had not even where to lay his head.” But on his ascension to heaven, he was “exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour^b,” and was invested with authority over all the powers of heaven, earth, and hell^c.]

The conduct of the citizens towards this nobleman marks the conduct which would be observed towards the Lord Jesus both by Jews and Gentiles—

[They “hated him,” we are told, “and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.” Thus the Jews treated our blessed Lord whilst he was yet in the midst of them; for they even put him to death for making himself a king, and declared, that they “had no king but Cæsar.” And after his ascension they strove to the uttermost to prevent the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, persecuting to imprisonment and death all who called themselves his subjects.

And what is the treatment which he receives from us at this day? The conduct of those citizens, as expressed in their message, marked *deliberation, union, virulence*: and with these

^a ὁ ἀγαπητός ἐγγενής.

^b Acts v. 31.

^c Eph. i. 20—22.

is our conduct very clearly stamped. Our rejection of Christ is not sudden or occasional, but constant and uniform — — — Nor is it peculiar to any one description of persons, but is found in all of every rank and every age — — — Nor is there any other thing under heaven which so kindles the wrath of men, or instigates them to such implacable animosity, as this; “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake,” and “whosoever killeth you, shall think he doeth God service” — — —]

The recompence awarded to them by him, shews what all the enemies of Christ must expect at his hands—

[He said to his attendants, “Bring hither those that were mine enemies, and would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me^d.” So when our blessed Lord shall come to judge the world, will he say to his attendant angels. He bore long with the Jews before he destroyed *them*: and so he may do with *us*. But he inflicted on them at last a judgment heavier far than ever befell any nation under heaven. And on us also at last, when the day of grace has terminated, shall wrath come to the very uttermost. *Now* every repenting sinner shall be spared and made partaker of his mercy: but *then* no pity shall be shewn to any impenitent transgressor; but all without exception shall have the cup of God’s indignation put into their hands, and shall drink of it to all eternity. If the sword that smites his rebellious subjects were to put an end to their existence, it were well: but the death which it inflicts will be attended with an agony of which no conception can be formed, and of which there shall be no mitigation or end so long as God himself shall endure.]

And now let me make my APPEAL to you:

1. Has not this been your conduct?

[The kingdom of Christ has been set up amongst you, and you have all been repeatedly called upon to submit to his sceptre. But who amongst you have thrown away the weapons of your rebellion? Who have renounced “the lords which have hitherto had dominion over them, and determined henceforth to make no mention of any other name than that of Christ?” Who account “his yoke light and easy,” and desire to have every thought of their hearts subjected to the obedience of Christ? You cannot but know that from your very earliest days, your own will, rather than his, has been the rule of your action; and that, instead of humbling yourselves before him, and seeking mercy through his atoning blood, you have maintained a stoutness of heart, most of you, at least, even to the present

^d ver. 27.

• Isai. xxvi. 13.

hour. I am well aware, that all have not equally avowed their independence on him, or proceeded to the same extremities in their rebellion against him: but whether you have rejected him with Pharisaic pride or with Sadducean indifference, the effect has been the same; you have equally in your hearts said, "Who is Lord over us?" "I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice." I warn you then, that though he has with astonishing patience and long-suffering borne with you hitherto, the time is shortly coming when he will call you to account; and when, if you persist in your rebellion, he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."]

2. Is not this your desert?

[We are apt to wonder at the Jews, that they could treat with such envenomed hostility a man like our blessed Saviour, so mild, so benevolent, so blameless. But their guilt is not to be compared with ours, whose views of his character are incomparably more enlarged. They saw him but as a *man*. We know him to be *God* as well as man, even "Emmanuel, God with us." They knew not the true end of his coming into the world: we know that he came "to give his life a ransom for us," and by his own obedience unto death to make reconciliation for us with our offended God. We even profess to believe in him, and to be his obedient followers: and yet, in our conduct, we shew ourselves "enemies to him in our minds by wicked works," even as they. What then can we expect but that the sword of vengeance shall be drawn forth against us, and that, when we shall stand before him in the last day, he will bid us to "depart accursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Dear brethren, I pray God you may not, by persisting in your rebellion, reduce yourselves to this awful condition. Now, if you will submit yourselves to him, he will be gracious and merciful unto you, and will "blot out your iniquities as a morning cloud;" but if you suffer this day of grace and salvation to pass unimproved, you will deplore it to all eternity: for "how can ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?"]

MDLXIV.

TALENTS LOST, IF NOT IMPROVED.

Luke xix. 26. *I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away.*

THE force of habit, irrespective of any particular influence from above, is well known. But, in addition

to that, God has annexed a blessing to the use of means, and has promised that they shall not be employed in vain. The words before us were uttered by our blessed Lord on different occasions. They seem to have been used by him as a kind of proverb. At all events, as being so repeated by him, they deserve particular attention. We may well consider them in a threefold view :

I. As a principle established—

God has ordained, not only that means shall be used in order to the end, but that the very mercies he has vouchsafed to us shall be either augmented or diminished, according as we exert ourselves for the improvement of them, or suffer them to lie by us unimproved. This he has established as a principle,

1. In nature—

[Every thing, in the first instance, is the gift of God. The fertility of the earth, the vegetative power of the seed, the genial influence of the sun and rain, are all of God. But still they would all be in vain without the labour of man. Adam was required to labour, even in Paradise: and so, now, man must till the ground, and use all the means which the different kinds of agriculture require, in order to ensure a crop; and, if he neglect his duty in these respects, not only will he lose the fruits which he might otherwise have obtained, but his land will sustain an injury which the labour of years will be scarcely able to repair. This is the account given us by Solomon, after beholding with his eyes the very event itself: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man*." Through his neglect of the proper means, not only does he fail to be enriched; but he loses what he possessed; and poverty, with gradual and irresistible force, seizes hold upon him.]

2. In grace—

[All the faculties which we possess are given us from above. But the understanding must be cultivated, the affections must receive a proper direction, and the conscience be

* Prov. xxiv. 3 — 34.

exercised as in the presence of the heart-searching God. If we will not exercise the faculties in the way which God has appointed, not only shall we suffer loss of all that we might have attained, but the understanding will become blind, the affections sensual, and the conscience seared. These were the very effects produced by the ministry of the Prophet Isaiah, amongst his hearers^b; as also by our blessed Lord^c and his Apostles, in their ministrations^d: so that in every age those words of Solomon have been verified, "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich^e."

If it be said, that our entire dependence upon God for every thing may well supersede all labour on our part; I answer, that, instead of superseding our exertions, it is urged as an encouragement to us to labour with all our might: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure^f." Nothing will be added to us but in the use of means; and "whether we be righteous or wicked, the fruit of our doings, and the reward of our hands, shall be given to us^g."]

The words of our text may be further considered,

II. As a fact realized—

They are realized in the experience of all, and especially amongst the people of the Lord;

1. In their gifts—

[God has given to his servants somewhat of a spiritual discernment; perhaps, too, a faculty to impart the knowledge they possess, and an ability to spread their wants before the Lord in prayer. Now these, and such like gifts, are increased by use, and lessened by neglect. Let any one look back to the time when any of these gifts were bestowed upon him, and mark what measure of improvement he has made of them; and then let him compare his present state in relation to them: and I doubt not but that he will acknowledge the truth of our Lord's assertion, that, whilst a good and diligent use was made of the gifts, they were augmented to him; and that, when he became remiss in the use of them, they were proportionably diminished. Indeed, this is nothing but what we are taught expressly to expect at the hands of God: for we are told, "It is impossible for those that were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away,

^b Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^c Matt. xiii. 13—15.

^d Acts xxviii. 25—27.

^e Prov. x. 4.

^f Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^g Isai. iii. 10, 11.

to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame^h." Here it is evident, that not only does a neglect of talents prevent the increase of them; but it causes them to be withdrawn, and brings an obduracy over the heart, and indisposes it for the reception of any further blessings.]

2. In their graces—

[On some, God has bestowed a measure of contrition, and faith, and love, and peace, and holiness: and we see, by the stony-ground hearers, what declension takes place in these graces, when the possessor of them becomes remiss in secret duties. He "leaves his first loveⁱ:" and "the things which remain in him are ready to die; insomuch, that he may appear rather as one dead, than alive^k." Let any one call to mind those favoured seasons, when his heart was dissolved in tears of penitential sorrow, or elevated with joy under a sense of God's pardoning love: let him now say, Whether, after having lost them by neglect, he finds it an easy thing to regain them? Rather let him say, Whether he be not in danger of having that realized, in his experience, which St. Peter has so awfully declared: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them^l." A work of grace is not like the work of a statuary, which, if left for a season, will be found unchanged; but like a stone rolled up a hill, which, when the labour ceases, will descend to the bottom, and require all the work to be performed again.]

Well then, may we regard the words of our text,

III. As a lesson inculcated—

Surely there is much in these words,

1. For our warning—

[There is not any one of us who has not some talent committed to him: and for that, whether it be more or less, we are responsible. The man who had but one talent, did wrong to hide it in a napkin: and justly was it taken from him, and he was consigned to punishment, as an unprofitable servant. We must "look to ourselves, and diligently too, that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward^m." The Israelites who came out of

^h Heb. vi. 4—6.

ⁱ Rev. ii. 4.

^k Rev. iii. 1, 2.

^l 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

^m 2 John, ver. 8.

Egypt, and yet perished in the wilderness, are held forth to us as a warning to make a due improvement of the mercies we have received^a. Our Lord also bids us to "remember Lot's wife." To every one of you, then, I would say, Employ your time, and put forth all your powers, in the service of the Lord. This is to every one of you a day of grace, a day of salvation. The Gospel now sounds in your ears. The Saviour is proclaimed to you in all the wonders of his love and mercy; and not one of you that will call upon him, shall be rejected. On the other hand, if, like Capernaum, you are exalted in your privileges, like Capernaum, shall you also be distinguished by a heavier condemnation, if you abuse them.] -

2. For our encouragement—

[If only we will engage diligently in the work assigned us, verily "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^b." Hear what blessed encouragement is afforded us by an inspired Apostle: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall not be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; but so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^c." What can any of us desire more than this? We would not wish to have our own labours dispensed with: all that any of us can wish, is, to be assured that they shall be effectual to the desired end. In the name of Almighty God, then, I declare to all of you, that to him who will employ his talents "shall more be given, and he shall have abundance^d;" abundance *here*, for more special improvement; and abundance *hereafter*, as his recompence of reward^e.]

^a Jude, ver. 5.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^c 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

^d Matt. xiii. 12.

^e ver. 17—19.

MDLXV.

CHRIST'S ENEMIES WARNED.

Luke xix. 27. *Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.*

IN any assembly of Christians, there appears, externally, but little difference between one and another:

for, as all profess the same faith, it may be supposed they stand nearly on the same footing as it respects the eternal world. But amongst them, if there be found many "friends" of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be acknowledged and rewarded by him in the future judgment, there will also be found many who, as enemies, shall be made objects of his everlasting displeasure. To assist you, my brethren, in ascertaining to which party you belong, and what sentence from him you are to expect, I will endeavour to shew you,

I. Who are they whom Christ will account his enemies—

We, in general, number none amongst his enemies except those who have been guilty of some very flagrant transgression; and even for them we find so many excuses, that we are ready to acquit them of any intentional disrespect to him. But he will judge by a very different standard from that which we adopt. He will inquire, What has been our regard for *him*, and what our conduct in reference to his revealed will?

He requires all to take upon them his light and easy yoke—

[He has a right to demand this at our hands. As our Creator, he may well expect that every faculty we possess should be employed for him. As our preserver, in whom we live and move and have our being, he is yet further entitled to every service which we can render to him. Above all, as our Redeemer, who "has bought us with the inestimable price" of his own blood, he may well expect that we live only for him, and that "our whole body, soul, and spirit be sanctified to his service.]

In what light, then, must he view us, if in this we counteract his will?

[Can he call us his friends? or can we flatter ourselves that we have any title to be regarded by him under that character? If "we will not that he should reign over us," that very disposition is itself an irrefragable proof that we are "enemies to him" in our hearts: we are enemies to his will, his kingdom, his glory. We cannot serve God and mammon too: whichever we affect, we must of necessity hate and despise

the other^a. We may think this "an hard saying:" but there is no such thing as neutrality in reference to God: "Whosoever will be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the enemy of God^b" — — —]

Supposing such persons to be justly designated the enemies of Christ, let us consider,

II. What is the judgment that awaits them—

They will certainly be distinguished by the Judge of quick and dead—

[Men in this world, who can judge only by the outward appearance, may easily be mistaken in their estimate of human character: but to Him who will decide the destinies of men, the most secret recesses of their hearts are open. He will discern with infallible certainty what their true character was: to his all-seeing eye it will be as obvious as to us is the difference between sheep and goats. And when he shall say to his angels, "Bring them hither," there will be no possibility of escape. None can hide themselves so as to escape their search; nor can any resist the power that summons them to his presence.]

Then will be inflicted on them the threatened judgments—

[Capital punishment amongst men is merely a privation of life: but the punishment that will be inflicted on the enemies of Christ will be of perpetual duration. There is "a lake of fire and brimstone, into which they will be cast;" and "the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever." This the Prophet Nahum distinctly affirms: "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth: the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies^c." The Psalmist also, if possible, yet more pertinently declares, "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies; thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them^d."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who think this a hard sentence—

[Let me ask, What can you reasonably expect? Can you suppose that God will "put no difference between his friends and his enemies; between those who serve him, and those who serve him not?" But you think that God will proclaim a

^a Matt. vi. 24.

^b Jam. iv. 4. See the Greek.

^c Nah. i. 2.

^d Ps. xxi. 8, 9.

^e Mal. iii. 18.

general amnesty; since he is *too great* to be affected by any thing that we have done, and *too good* to notice it with such severity. Amongst earthly governments, a general amnesty may well be proclaimed, and punishment be limited to those who have been the ringleaders in rebellion. Indeed, a monarch who should proceed to extremity with all who have risen up against him, might almost depopulate his empire; and, if he exercise mercy, the pardoned rebels may richly repay him by their fidelity in future. But God needs not us, nor can ever be repaid by us, for any lenity which he may exercise. He must and will fulfil his own word, and will execute judgment on all impenitent transgressors. And the only hope that remains for us, is, to humble ourselves before him, and to seek for mercy through that very Saviour, against whom we have rebelled.]

2. Those who acquiesce in it—

[Many *acquiesce* in the declarations of God *as true*, who by no means *approve* of them *as good*: and I pray you, brethren, not to confound these ideas, or to give yourselves credit for the better feeling, because you cannot divest yourselves of that which forces itself irresistibly upon you. Never imagine that you are right in the sight of God, till you delight in the Redeemer's yoke as light and easy, and are ready, as faithful subjects, to lay down your lives in his service.]

MDLXVI.

OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

Luke xix. 37, 38. *And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the Disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.*

DURING the greater part of our Lord's ministry upon earth, he abstained, for the most part, from an avowal of his Messiahship, especially when conversing with the Scribes and Pharisees: he rather left it to be inferred from his words and actions, than asserted it in plain terms. Two reasons he had for this reserve: one was, to prevent his zealous followers from proclaiming him a king; and the other was, to keep the wrath of his enemies from breaking forth to the uttermost, before he should have finished the work which

God had given him to do. Now, however, the time being come for him to return to his Father, he openly acknowledged himself to be that King, of whom the Prophet Zechariah had spoken, saying, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass^a." In general, the fulfilment of prophecy was left to the course of events: but here our Lord himself directed the events which were to accomplish the prediction^b. The acclamations of the multitude, at the time of his fulfilling this prophecy, will afford us a profitable subject for our present meditation. Let us consider,

I. The acclamations themselves—

Doubtless the people at that time had abundant reason to rejoice—

[They had long seen the wonderful works which the Lord Jesus had done; and more especially a most stupendous miracle just wrought—the restoring of Lazarus to life, after he had been dead four days. This carried to the minds of multitudes a more than ordinary conviction of Christ's Messiahship; because Lazarus went in and out before them, a living witness of his power: and so universal was this impression, that "the chief priests consulted to put Lazarus to death^c," in order to remove from before their eyes an evidence which they could not withstand.

Persuaded that he was indeed the Messiah, they welcomed him with suitable expressions of admiration and love. They felt that it was an inestimable privilege to behold Him of whom Moses and the prophets had for so many ages spoken, and whom many prophets and kings had in vain desired to see.]

The particular expressions of their joy must be distinctly noticed—

[They were the very terms which David, a thousand years before, had suggested as suited to the occasion^d. How far the people used them in their highest sense, we cannot exactly declare. We fear their views of him were too carnal to admit of their entering into the full import of the Psalmist's words. Yet, even in their view of them, the sending of the

^a Zech. ix. 9.

^c John xii. 9, 10.

^b Matt. xxi. 4, 5.

^d Ps. cxviii. 23, 26

Messiah was justly deemed an evidence of God's good-will towards them; and they did well in rendering unto God the utmost possible tribute of adoration and thanksgiving.]

But, not to occupy our time with that which merely concerned *them*, let us consider,

II. What reason *we* also have for similar expressions of joy—

That Jesus is come to us, we can have no doubt. We, therefore, have reason for more exalted joy; because,

1. The evidences of his Messiahship are to us more clear—

[We have all the same evidences that they had; except that they saw the miracles with their eyes, whilst we only hear of them by the report of others. Yet, when that report is duly considered, it will be found not a whit less satisfactory than ocular demonstration. Besides, *we* have an evidence which *they* could not have; an evidence far surpassing all other; namely, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead. On *this*, Jesus had, from the very beginning, rested the whole weight and evidence of his pretensions: "Destroy this temple; and in three days I will raise it up again." *This*, we are told, "he spake respecting his body," which he would raise from the grave the third day*. Knowing, therefore, that he has accomplished *this*, we can have no doubt who He is, or that he is "declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead".]

2. The nature of his kingdom is, by us, more fully understood—

[They, not excepting even his own Apostles, had an idea of a temporal Messiah, who should deliver them from the Roman yoke, and exalt their nation to greater power and splendour than ever they enjoyed even in the days of Solomon*. But *we* know, that his kingdom is spiritual; and that he is come to deliver us from sin and Satan, death and hell. We have indeed in ourselves an evidence of his power. We know what it is to have "his kingdom set up within us;" to have both his enemies and ours bruised under our feet; and to be "brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God." We, therefore, have proportionably greater reason to rejoice; because the benefits which we are taught to look for are so far beyond all that they had any conception of.]

* John ii. 19—22.

† Rom. i. 4.

‡ Acts i. 6.

3. The interest we have in him is also more deep and lasting—

[Many of them had been healed in their bodies; but *we*, even every one of us that welcomes him aright, have been healed in our *souls*, and have his healing work continually carrying on within us. They, whatever benefits they might receive, looked only to this life as the season for enjoying them. But we look to the eternal world, as the true and proper season for enjoying the fulness of his blessings. The commencement of them, indeed, we here possess, in pardon of sin, deliverance from its power, and in the manifestations of God's love to our souls. But *these* are only earnest of our full inheritance, which we shall possess for ever in a better world.

I think, that when these considerations are duly weighed, we shall have no hesitation in adopting, in the highest possible sense, the acclamations that were used by them.]

Let me, however, ADD,

1. A word of caution—

[It is evident that the joy of that people was of a tumultuous kind: and I confess I am no friend to such expressions of piety amongst us. It was suited for *them*; but it is not so for *us*. Our joy in the Lord should be more *intelligent*, more *humble*, more *quiet*, more *enduring*.

We should have just views of Christ altogether, and of the whole work which he came to accomplish — — — We should have a deeper sense of our need of him, and of our utter undone state without him — — — We should have less of animal fervour, and more of that which is spiritual — — — And, with us, it should be not merely occasional, as called forth by some particular circumstance, but the daily and continued habit of our minds. In a word, ours should resemble rather the joy of the glorified saints above, who prostrate themselves on their faces before the throne, and rest not, day nor night, in ascribing glory to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb.]

2. A word of encouragement—

[If you truly glory in the Saviour as you ought to do, you will find Pharisees in abundance ready to condemn you for your zeal and love. One would have thought, that the reasons which that people had to exalt the Saviour were abundantly sufficient to justify them, even in the eyes of those who could not participate their joy. But envy is of a peculiarly malignant character: and they who have no piety themselves, hate to behold the exercise of it in others. Know, however, that

if man condemn, God approves, the exercises of love; and that they who "confess Christ before men shall be confessed by him before God and all his holy angels."]^a

^a If this should be a subject for *Christmas Day*, the joy that is recommended may be contrasted with that which is so generally sought after at that season.

MDLXVII.

OUR DUTY TOWARDS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Luke xix. 40. *I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.*

THE exercise of the affections is not only approved, but applauded, when earthly things are the objects of our pursuit: but, when the soul is attracted by heavenly objects, the livelier emotions of the mind are deemed enthusiasm; and even gratitude itself must restrain its voice, lest it incur the censure of the world. But, whatever construction may be put upon our conduct, or whatever difficulties we may be called to encounter in the discharge of our duty, we should study to approve ourselves to God, and to render unto him the honour due unto his name. At the time of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem "the whole multitude of his Disciples began to rejoice, and to praise God for all the mighty works that they had seen^a." But, acceptable as this tribute of praise was to God, it excited only envy and indignation in the breasts of the malignant Pharisees. They considered this display of their gratitude as a just ground for displeasure; and therefore desired our Lord to silence them; "Master," said they, "rebuke thy Disciples." Our blessed Lord, however, instead of rebuking, vindicated his Disciples; and declared, that if, from any motive whatever, they should be induced to withhold their grateful acknowledgments, they would do so to their eternal shame: "I tell you," &c.

In discoursing on these words, we shall,

^a ver. 37.

I. Shew what obligations we lie under to magnify and adore the Lord—

The Disciples at that time had abundant reason to praise his name—

[*They had seen the miracles he had wrought, and especially that of raising Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead four days^b: perhaps many of them had themselves experienced his power to heal. From what they had seen and heard, they were assured, that he was the Messiah so long promised to the world^c: and they regarded his advent as the most wonderful expression of God's favour toward their whole nation. Could they then keep silence? Were they to be blamed for testifying their love to this august Personage, now that they saw him in the very act of fulfilling one of the most remarkable of all the prophecies^d? When they were thus highly privileged to witness, what "many prophets and kings had in vain wished to see and hear," would they not have been guilty of the basest ingratitude, if they had held their peace? If Abraham leaped for joy at a distant prospect of that period, should not they much rather^e?]*

But our obligations to praise him are far greater than theirs—

[*We have a far clearer knowledge of the dignity of his person. They viewed him indeed as "a great prophet;" and on some occasions they seemed to have thought him more than human: but on the whole, they considered him as a mere man, though indeed the greatest of men. But we know him to be "God manifest in the flesh," even "God over all, blessed for ever^f." And shall we behold in him such adorable majesty and condescension, and yet withhold from him our tribute of praise?*

We also are far better acquainted with the ends of his mission. The Disciples supposed that he was sent to instruct them more fully in the knowledge of God's will, to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and to make them a prosperous and happy people. But we know that he came to deliver us from the yoke of sin and Satan, to reconcile us to God by the death of his cross, to teach us, not by his word only, but by his Spirit, and finally, to save us with an everlasting salvation. Are not we then bound to bless and adore his name?

Moreover, we have a far deeper insight into the extent of his benefits. If the Disciples had seen their nation raised to universal empire, and enjoying uninterrupted peace and prosperity,

^b John xii. 17, 18.

^c ver. 38.

^d Compare Zech. ix. 9. with John xii. 13—15. ^e John viii. 56.

^f 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. ix. 5. Heb. i. 3. Col. ii. 9.

they would have been well satisfied, and would have looked for nothing beyond it, especially if they themselves were exalted to the highest offices of dignity and power. But we look for infinitely richer benefits at his hands. We expect the pardon of sin, and peace with God, and victory over our spiritual enemies, and "a kingdom that cannot be moved." Shall *we* then refuse to praise him? "If we should hold our peace, will not the very stones cry out against us?"]

This being clear, we shall proceed to,

II. Enforce our duty from some additional considerations—

That we may be excited to rend the air with our acclamations and hosannas, let us consider,

1. How delightful a duty this is!

[It is justly observed by the Psalmist, that it is not only "a good," but also "a pleasant thing to be thankful." Who can doubt which were the happier, the disciples who shouted forth the praises of their Lord, or the Pharisees, who, with malignant jealousy, strove to silence them? Indeed, a devout and grateful spirit is a foretaste of heaven itself; and, as far as relates to the outward exercise of their affection, the Disciples on that occasion strongly resembled the heavenly hosts: they all were penetrated with fervent love to the same divine object, and exerted all their powers to magnify his name. Let us then, each in his place and station, be followers of them; and our happiness shall surely rise with our employment.]

2. How reasonable a duty it is!

[The Pharisees, if they had been asked the reason of their conduct, would doubtless have offered many specious arguments in vindication of themselves. They might have imputed the conduct of the Disciples to enthusiasm, ostentation, hypocrisy. They might have blamed Jesus for suffering them to raise such a tumult, and to endanger thereby the peace of the whole city. They might have ascribed his acquiescence to vain-glory, and a love of popularity, which did but ill accord with his pretensions to superior wisdom and humility. This would have appeared very satisfactory in their eyes; and they, like our modern Pharisees, would have arrogated to themselves the exclusive name of *rational* Christians. But we know on whose side reason was in the instance before us: and as long as infinite greatness, and unbounded goodness, deserve our admiration, so long will it be reasonable to bless and magnify our adorable Jesus with all our might.]

3. How necessary a duty it is!

[The Pharisees thought that, if Jesus merited any respect at all, his Disciples should have regarded him only with silent reverence, instead of attracting so much attention by their clamorous proceedings. But our Lord told them, that silent reverence, however great, was not sufficient; that they were bound to give a public testimony of their affection; and that, if they withheld it, they would be traitors to his cause. Though therefore we be not called to bear our testimony precisely in the same way, yet are we all bound to confess Christ before men^s, and to let it be seen, "Whose we are, and whom we serve."

Shall it be said, That there is no such occasion now for our public acknowledgements as there was then; we answer, That the world needs as much as ever to have their attention drawn to the Lord Jesus, and to be stimulated to love and serve him. And, if this were not the case, still it would be our duty to confess him openly, since in heaven, where he is universally known, he is universally and incessantly adored.]

ADDRESS^b—

1. Those who, like the Pharisees, have no heart to adore the Lord—

[It is not difficult to determine who would have taken part with the Disciples, and who with the Pharisees. We need only ask, What is our conduct *now*? Are we frequently and fervently engaged in the secret exercises of the closet, and are we bold in confessing Christ before an ungodly world? Or are we formal in secret duties, and ready to blame the superior zeal of others? If we be of this latter class, we should surely have joined the Pharisees in their opposition to the Disciples. To such then we say, Deceive not yourselves with vain excuses; nor think to justify yourselves by condemning others. Suppose for a moment that the Disciples, in their zeal, had exceeded the strict bounds of prudence and propriety: was that any reason why the Pharisees should render him no praise at all? Was less due from them, because others paid too much? Yea rather, was not their pretended zeal for propriety, a mere cloak for their own envy or indifference? Away then with such base dispositions as they manifested; and, instead of blaming the zeal of others, endeavour to "glorify Christ with

^s Matt. x. 32, 33.

^b If this be the subject of a *Commemoration Sermon*, the particular blessings that are commemorated should be opened in this place, and the audience be exhorted, in their *carnal* feasting, not to be unmindful of that *spiritual* joy which the occasion demands. In this case, the following address might be omitted.

your body and your spirit which are his¹." Far be it from us to countenance excess: but in this lukewarm age, we are far more in danger of erring from defect. This, at least, is *your* danger, whilst, with all your jealousy about being "righteous *over-much*," you have no fears lest you should not be found "righteous *enough*." To *you* therefore, in the name, and by the command, of Christ himself, we say, "Be zealous and repent^k."]

2. Those who, like the Disciples, feel their hearts warmed with love to Christ—

[You must expect to meet with opposition from the world, and especially from proud, envious, malignant Pharisees. But let not the fear of their censures deter you from the path of duty¹. If Jesus have given up his life for you, it is a small matter for you to give up your names for him: and if you will not bear so light a cross as that of being called by some opprobrious name for him, you have little reason to number yourselves among his true disciples^m. It will be proper indeed for you to consider times and places, and sometimes to lay a restraint on your feelings, lest by an unseasonable disclosure of them, you "cast your pearls before swine, that will only turn and rend youⁿ." But let not the fear of man be the restraining principle: rather, let the love of Christ be the one motive for moderating, as well as for exhibiting, the proofs of your love. Then shall you in due season have a public testimony of *his* approbation, when those who now condemn you shall be themselves condemned.]

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^k Rev. iii. 19.

¹ Heb. xiii. 13.

^m Matt. x. 38.

ⁿ Matt. vii. 6.

MDLXVIII.

CHRIST'S COMPASSION TO LOST SINNERS.

Luke xix. 41, 42. *And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.*

IN profane history we are often called upon to admire the actions of conquerors, and of heroes. But most of the feats proposed for our admiration serve rather to evince the depravity of our nature; and are calculated only to excite horror and disgust in a well-instructed mind. Perhaps, of real

magnanimity, the world never yet witnessed a more glorious instance than that before us; wherein we behold the Saviour of mankind weeping over his blood-thirsty enemies, and most pathetically lamenting their invincible ignorance and unbelief. To enter fully into the scope of his words, it will be necessary to consider them,

I. In reference to Jerusalem—

The Jews had long been the most favoured nation under heaven—

[They had had the oracles of God committed to them, when the rest of the world were left to the suggestions of unenlightened reason. The way of life and salvation was exhibited to them in their daily sacrifices, and more especially in those offered annually on the great day of atonement. They had been taught by a long succession of prophets, who were divinely qualified and commissioned to make known to them the will of God. Above all, they had now been privileged to hear the Messiah himself, and to see all his doctrines confirmed with the most numerous, most stupendous, and most unquestionable miracles. These were such advantages for the obtaining of eternal life as none others ever enjoyed, and such as must have proved effectual, if Satan had not blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts.]

But they were now speedily to be given over to the judgments they had merited—

[They had in no respect rendered unto God according to the benefits received from him. On the contrary, they had made void the law, and established their own traditions as of superior obligation. Instead of hearkening to the prophets, they persecuted them unto death: and instead of yielding to the wisdom and authority of the Messiah, they imputed his miracles to a confederacy with the devil, and incessantly plotted to take away his life. Within the space of four days they were to fill up the measure of their iniquities by effecting their murderous purposes: and wrath was in due time to come upon them to the uttermost for all the righteous blood that they had spilled, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Christ and his Apostles. They were to be given up to judicial blindness and obduracy; and the whole nation were to suffer such calamities from the hands of the Romans, as never had been endured by any nation since the foundation of the world: and all this was but an earnest of infinitely heavier judgments, which were to abide upon them for ever and ever.]

Our Lord, foreseeing their impending miseries, was filled with compassion towards them—

[He might well have spoken to them in those terms of indignant triumph, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" But he had far other thoughts on this occasion: knowing the full extent of the miseries that were coming on them, his bowels yearned over them. Nor did he only pity them as one possessed of human passions, but as their Mediator, who had come from heaven to seek and save them. Perhaps too the thought that he should one day be their Judge, and be necessitated to pass the awful sentence of condemnation on their souls, oppressed, and, for a moment, overwhelmed his spirit. Often had he already traile, as it were, in birth with them; and now he was about to lay down his life for them. But, except to a little remnant, his efforts would be in vain. With respect to far the greater part of them, the things belonging to their peace were about to be hid from their eyes: yet if even at that hour they would have repented, he would gladly "have gathered them, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." But, alas! they would not; and he foresaw moreover that they never would: and therefore, despairing of ever bringing them to happiness, he looked on them with the tenderest emotions of pity, and with a flood of tears poured forth this pathetic lamentation.]

Nor could the circumstances he was in at all divert his attention from them—

[He was surrounded by vast multitudes of people; yet was he not ashamed to stop the procession, and to weep before them all. They were all crying "Hosannah to the Son of David; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest;" yet was he deaf to their acclamations and hosannas. He foresaw all the conflicts which he was about to sustain, and the agonies he was speedily to suffer for the satisfying of divine justice; yet was he altogether insensible to his own concerns, and occupied about the welfare of his most inveterate enemies. Who but God could have exercised such magnanimity as this, or manifested such unbounded compassion?]

But, not to confine these things to the Jews, let us consider them further,

II. In reference to ourselves—

Peculiar as these circumstances were, they were both written for our admonition, and intended to

represent the compassion which Jesus yet bears towards us.

We, like the Jews, have had a day of grace afforded us—

[The things belonging to our peace have been plainly revealed to us, and, we trust, faithfully declared amongst us. The way of acceptance through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, has incessantly been pointed out in the written word, in the offices of our Liturgy, in the administration of the sacraments, and in the preached Gospel. Moreover, the Holy Spirit has often striven with us to bring us to repentance; but, with respect to very many amongst us, the means have hitherto been used in vain. There are yet too many unacquainted with their depravity, and unsolicitous about an interest in the Saviour. Deeply as their eternal peace is involved in these things, they are ignorant of them, if not in theory, at least in their practical and sanctifying efficacy.]

With respect to many, this day of grace is quickly drawing to a close—

[Certain it is that, even while we are yet possessing the outward means of grace, the inward power, that alone can render them effectual, may be withdrawn. God plainly warns us that “his Spirit shall not alway strive with man:” and that by continuing to resist the Holy Ghost, we may not only “grieve” and “vex” him, but may ultimately “quench” his sacred motions. And how inexpressibly dreadful is the state of one, concerning whom God has said, “He is joined to idols, let him alone!” If once this sentence be pronounced, the things belonging to our peace will be as effectually hidden from our eyes, as if we were cut off out of the land of the living: and we shall live henceforth only to add sin to sin, and to “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.” But at all events as soon as death comes, our day of grace must terminate; and, if we have lived all our days ignorant of Christ and his salvation, we have then no more hope of mercy than the fallen angels. And how many are there, not only of the aged and infirm, but also of the young and healthy, against whom death has already pointed his dart, and whose speedy dissolution is foreknown to God!]

And may we not suppose that Jesus is now looking, as it were, upon them with tender compassion?

[He has not now indeed the same susceptibility of grief and sorrow which once he had: but does he not long for the salvation of sinners as much as ever? Does he not look on some, whose day of grace is nearly passed, and say, “O that

thou mightest know, *at least in this thy day*, the things that belong unto thy peace?" Does he not behold even the proudest Pharisee, and the most abandoned profligate, and without excluding either of them from his mercy, say, O that *thou, even thou*, wouldest turn unto me, that I might save thee! Yes surely, his address to every sinner is, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Let us suppose for a moment that he were to come into this assembly, and to look round about upon us all; what would be the feelings of his benevolent heart? Methinks, when he beheld so many ignorant of his salvation, and perishing in the midst of mercy, he would burst into a flood of tears. A sight of so many, who by disease or accident will soon be hurried into the eternal world, while yet they are unprepared to meet their God; a sight of so many continuing gay and thoughtless, or careful only about this present world, would pierce him with the deepest sorrow, and extort from him a lamentation similar to that before us. Yea, at this moment is he inspecting all our hearts, and, as far as his situation admits of it, is grieved on our account: nor can all the anthems of saints around the throne so occupy his attention, as to make him regardless of our deplorable condition.]

Let us then SEE the folly of an inconsiderate and careless state—

[Perhaps many in that day might wonder at this exercise of Christ's compassion, and consider his weeping over the people as a mark of folly and extravagance: and many at this time, if they should behold a servant of Christ expressing a concern for immortal souls in the same way, would laugh at him as a weak enthusiast. But who that knows the value of a soul, and sees in what a delusive security the generality are living, must not confess, that there is just occasion for all the compassion we can exercise, and all the zeal we can put forth? Can we imagine that Jesus would have felt so much, or given such vent to his feelings on this occasion, if there had not been sufficient reason for it. Suppose we knew for certain, that one amongst us had lost his day of grace; would it not become us all to weep over him? Let us then learn to weep for ourselves; and seek the things belonging to our peace, lest they be speedily, and for ever, hid from our eyes.]

Let us also ACKNOWLEDGE the blessedness of a converted state—

[If our Lord wept over the ignorant and ungodly, we may well conceive that he would rejoice over those who are divinely instructed, and walking in the way of godliness. Indeed he has represented himself as the shepherd rejoicing over his

recovered sheep, and the father over the returning Prodigal. He has even said, "He will rejoice over us with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over us with singing." Surely then neither is *this* without a cause: there must be real reason for joy, if Jesus himself rejoice over us. A soul enlightened, sanctified, and saved! O what cause for joy! Who that knows the temporal, and much more the eternal, judgments that fell upon the great body of the Jewish nation, would not incomparably prefer the state of those, who are persecuted unto death, before that of their proud oppressors? Let us then improve "this our accepted time, our day of salvation." Let us be earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life: so shall we have reason for triumph, though in the most afflictive circumstances; and shall rejoice for ever in the presence of our God, when all others shall be "cast into that lake of fire, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."]

MDLXIX.

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

Luke xx. 15. *So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?*

WHEN the mind is unbiassed, it can easily discern between truth and error, especially where the grounds of judgment are clear and strong. But where persons are under the influence of prejudice or worldly interest, they are blind to the most obvious conclusions, and obstinately tenacious of the most absurd opinions. Hence our Lord spake so much in parables; because his adversaries, not aware of their drift at first, were easily brought to acknowledge things, which, if more plainly delivered, would have excited the most inveterate opposition. In this manner he gained their assent to the equity of God in executing the heaviest judgments on themselves and their whole nation.

This was the scope of the parable before us*——— in opening which, we shall shew,

I. In whom this heinous wickedness is found—

It was manifestly accomplished in those to whom the parable was spoken—

* Read the whole parable, ver. 9—16.

[God had planted his Church among the Jews, and had cultivated it with peculiar care^b. From it he expected a revenue of honour and glory: and when the people were forgetful to pay it, he sent his prophets to remind them of their duty, and to stir them up to the performance of it. But they abused his messengers in every successive age, and beat them, and sent them away empty. He, however, averse to punish them as they deserved, sent, last of all, his Son, in hopes that, when they should see his exalted dignity, his clear credentials, and his unbounded benevolence, they would reverence and obey him. But they, wishing to retain undisturbed possession of their lusts, determined to cast him out and kill him. And though, when warned that they would do so, they exclaimed, 'God forbid that we should treat the Messiah thus^c!' they actually fulfilled the parable within the space of three days, and put to death God's only begotten Son.]

And is it not accomplished in us also ?

[It is true that we cannot crucify him as the Jews did, because he is not within our reach; but nevertheless we cast him out with as much indignity as ever they did. As he was among them, "the man whom the nation abhorred," so is he still "despised and rejected of men," "a butt of contradiction" to an ungodly world^d. How is he treated by *the ungodly and profane*^e? When he comes to them in the ministry of the word, and demands their hearts for God, do they not thrust him away, saying, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" "We will not have this man to reign over us?" And how do the *self-righteous moralists* regard him^f? When he calls them to build on him as the only foundation of their hopes, do they not make him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence^g? Do they not persist in going about to establish their own righteousness, instead of thankfully submitting to his^h? Among his very followers too, are there not many *self-deceiving professors*ⁱ, who acknowledge him in words, but in works deny him^k? If others crucify him more openly, these, like Judas, betray him with a kiss. Lastly, what shall be said of *vile apostates*^l, who having once embraced his cause, decline from his ways, and go back unto the world? Are we not expressly told, that they crucify him afresh¹, and "tread him under foot?" By all of these then is Jesus cast out of the vineyard, as much as ever he was by the Jews of old.]

^b Isai. v. 1—4.

^c ver. 16.

^d Luke ii. 34, 35.

^e Shew under each of these heads (*printed in Italics*) what the Lord requires of them; which however they will not do.

^f Acts vii. 27.

^g Luke xix. 14.

^h Rom. ix. 30—33.

ⁱ Rom. x. 3.

^k Tit. i. 16.

^l Heb. vi. 6.

Let us then consider attentively,

II. What portion such persons must expect—

The Jews, as our Lord foretold, were visited with the heaviest calamities—

[They, when interrogated by our Lord, confessed what such labourers must expect at the hands of their lord^m. And behold, it happened to them according to their word. That generation was not passed away, before their city was burnt up, their people were massacred without distinction, and their whole polity, civil and religious, was dissolved. Nor can any one reflect on their treatment of their Messiah, without acknowledging the equity of those unparalleled judgments that were inflicted on them.]

And shall not the wrath of God fall on those also who condemn him now?

[Let our Lord's appeal be considered, "What shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" Would any rational person imagine that he should shew kindness to such obstinate transgressors? Do we not see immediately that God must be incensed against them? must he not be displeased with those who withhold from him the tribute of their love? Must he not be indignant also that his messages of mercy are so continually slighted? And above all, must not the contempt poured upon his only dear Son, provoke him to anger? What can we expect, but that his wrath should wax hot against us, and "burn even to the lowest hell^a?" Let any one impartially consider the ingratitude and impiety of such conduct, and he will confess that the everlasting punishment of such offenders is no more than adequate to their just desert^o.]

Let us then LEARN from this parable,

1. That we are accountable to God for all the advantages we enjoy—

[If God has made us his vineyard, and bestowed culture upon us, doubtless such a favour entails upon us an obligation to love and serve him. And if he have sent a succession of faithful servants to remind us of our duty, and direct us in the performance of it, this also calls for correspondent acknowledgments from us. Above all, if he have sent us his only dear Son, not only to instruct us, but to die for us, we should be incessantly filled with admiration of his love, and with zeal for his glory. But these very mercies, if overlooked and despised, will bring upon us the heavier indignation. Think

^m Matt. xxi. 41.

^a Deut. xxxii. 22.

^o Heb. ii. 3. and x. 28, 29.

then for how many things, both temporal and spiritual, you are indebted to God; and begin immediately to render to him his dues. That which, above all, he requires is, the tribute of a grateful heart. O that he may receive it daily from us; and that we may devote ourselves to him in body, soul, and spirit!]

2. That we are peculiarly responsible for our treatment of Jesus Christ—

[Christ is the Father's greatest gift. Our past abuse of all his other mercies may be forgiven, provided we be duly sensible of this mercy. However long we have alienated God's property, yea, however shamefully we have abused his other messengers, if now we repent us of our sins, and turn to him in the name of Jesus, he will pardon our past transgressions, and remember our iniquities no more. But, if we continue to slight the Saviour, all other changes will be to no purpose. We may turn from profaneness to morality, or may even profess a regard for Jesus himself; yet if we do not cordially receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent into the world, we shall only deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. Let us then "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn." Then shall God's indignation be turned to love; and we shall be made partakers of his eternal inheritance.]

MDLXX.

THE REJECTED CORNER STONE.

Luke xx. 17, 18. *And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

MANY truths delivered by our Lord militated strongly against the carnal notions of his hearers: they were ready on many occasions to reply, "This is an hard saying, who can hear it?" But he invariably appealed to their own Scriptures in confirmation of his word. Nor could any better method of silencing their objections be possibly devised. He had just warned the priests and elders that they would kill their Messiah; and that God would on that account transfer his Church to the Gentiles*. They, not

* ver. 13—16.

conceiving that either of those events could ever take place, cried, "God forbid!" Our Lord, in reply, referred them to their own Scriptures, and added a most awful declaration of his own, in order that he might impress the passage more deeply on their minds. We shall consider,

I. The passage appealed to—

The words in their primary sense refer to David^b—

But they most undoubtedly have a reference to Christ also—

[Christ is represented in Scripture as the stone that should both *support* and *connect* the Church of God^c: and the passage referred to in the text particularly declared, that he should be rejected by the very persons whose duty it was to *edify* and build up the Church. It announced however the determination of God to frustrate their designs, and to establish him as the head of the corner in spite of all their endeavours to destroy him. In this view the passage is quoted no less than *six* times in the New Testament: and its full accomplishment was triumphantly proclaimed before the very builders who had rejected him^d.]

The particular manner in which our Lord appealed to them is worthy of notice—

[He "beheld" the objectors with a mixture of indignation and pity. He referred them to the words as to a passage well known among them, and generally considered even among themselves as applicable to the Messiah. His very look, together with the pointed manner of his address, intimated to them, that they were at that moment ignorantly fulfilling that prophecy, and that nothing but the most inveterate prejudice could induce them to persist one moment longer in such glaring impiety.]

The importance of this appeal will more strongly appear, if we consider,

II. The declaration founded upon it—

^b David's establishment on the throne of Israel had been opposed to the uttermost: Saul had laboured incessantly to kill him: after the death of Saul, two tribes only acknowledged him as their king: it was seven years before the other tribes became subject to him: and then all the surrounding nations sought his destruction. But God made him triumphant over all: in remembrance of which mercy he penned the words before us. See Ps. cxviii. 10, 22.

^c Isai. xxviii. 16.

^d Acts ii. 36. and iv. 11, 12.

The latter part of the text is understood by most as intimating the more aggravated punishment that persecutors would incur beyond that of other unbelievers*. Perhaps we may rather understand it as importing,

1. That all, who stumble at Christ, greatly endanger their own souls—

[Many are the grounds of offence which Christ affords to proud and ungodly men. To some the sublimity, to others the simplicity, to some the strictness, and to others the grace of his Gospel, becomes a stumbling-block. Hence some professedly “deny the Lord who bought them,” while others, “call him Lord, but will not do what he commands.” These equally stumble at Christ himself^f. And as he who falls upon a great stone, will bruise and maim his body, so does he who thus stumbles at Christ wound his own soul^g. Solomon, expressly speaking of Christ, attests this awful truth^h—]

2. That they who provoke him to cut them off in their impenitence, will perish certainly and without a remedy—

[Many have rejected him for a season, and found acceptance with him at last; but they who abide in unbelief must inevitably perish. The despised Jesus will fall upon them at the last day, and grind them to powder: the weight of rocks and mountains would not more effectually crush a potter's vessel, than he will his obstinate and unbelieving enemiesⁱ.]

Surely this is a declaration which deserves the deepest attention—

[They who oppose the truth of Christ, think that they shall retard his work; at least, they do not apprehend that they shall endanger themselves. But they “kick against the pricks^k.” As well may persons hope to wound a rock by casting themselves down upon it, as that they shall ever prevail against the Church of Christ: the injury will ultimately be sustained by themselves alone. The voice of God therefore

* They suppose also that there is an allusion to the manner in which persons were stoned to death, viz. by casting them down first upon a large stone, and then throwing large stones upon them.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 8.

^g What pangs of conscience, and dread of death and judgment, do such persons experience!

^h Prov. viii. 30, 36.

ⁱ Ps. ii. 9.

^k Acts ix. 5.

in the text is like that of David, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way¹."

ADVICES—

1. Attend diligently to every word of God which ye read or hear—

[The knowledge, which the Jews had by means of the Scriptures, rendered their guilt in rejecting Christ incomparably more heinous than that of the Roman soldiers; and we who enjoy the still clearer light of the New Testament, must contract ten-fold guilt if we reject him. How shall we be able to endure that appeal which will be made to us in the day of judgment, 'Were not such and such things written respecting me? were not my invitations, promises, and exhortations set before you? were you not forewarned of the evils which a rejection of me would bring upon you?' — — — Give earnest heed then to the word ye hear, lest, instead of proving a saviour of life unto life, it become a saviour of death unto death^m.]

2. Examine carefully what regard ye are paying to Christ—

[All do not make him the head of the corner: many reject him still. If we be not with him, we are against himⁿ. All that disobey him, as truly stumble at him, as if they were his avowed enemies^o. Inquire then whether ye make him the foundation whereon ye build, and the corner-stone that unites you in love to every part of God's spiritual temple. By this must ye know that ye are his true disciples.]

3. Be thankful if you have attained even the smallest knowledge of Christ—

[There is no hope whatever for those who, in a Christian land, die ignorant of Christ^p. But they who know him, have nothing to fear. To them is promised eternal life^q. When the whole assembly of the ungodly shall be banished from his presence, they shall stand with great boldness^r. When the wicked will be crying to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, the followers of the Lamb will be triumphing in their God. This promise is sure to all the seed^s. Let Jesus then be more precious to all our souls; let us willingly consent to his being the head of the corner; let us, as lively stones, ever seek to be built up upon him^t; and, though we should be despised and rejected like him, let us never be ashamed of owning him as all our salvation and all our desire.]

¹ Ps. ii. 12.

^m 2 Cor. ii. 16.

ⁿ Matt. xii. 30.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 8.

^p 2 Thess. i. 8.

^q John xvii. 3.

^r 2 Thess. i. 9, 10.

^s Rom. ix. 33.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

MDLXXI.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO BEAR PERSECUTION.

Luke xxi. 17—19. *Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls.*

IN applying to ourselves the addresses of our Lord to his Disciples, we are liable to err, if we do not distinguish between their situation and our own. As far as we are in their circumstances, the application will be just, but no further. They were taught to expect on trying occasions such aid from God, as would entirely supersede the necessity of study on their part^a: but if *we* should form such expectations, we should only tempt God, and expose his cause to the derision of his enemies. Nevertheless, inasmuch as we are subject to many of the same difficulties with them, we may reasonably hope for the same supports and consolations. Though therefore we willingly concede, that it would be enthusiastic and absurd in us to expect the miraculous influences which were vouchsafed to them, we may regard the words before us as addressed to ourselves. In them we have,

I. An alarming declaration—

[Piety has been an object of aversion to fallen man in all ages^b — — — Where it has appeared in its most perfect forms, it has been most reviled and persecuted^c — — — It might have been hoped indeed that the glorious effects of Christianity would disarm its enemies: but the enmity of the human heart against God has never appeared so strong, as it has since the establishment of Christianity in the world — — — And to this hour does a conformity to its precepts call forth the same wrath and bitterness as it did in the Apostle's days. The laws enacted for its support do indeed restrain men from executing all that is in their hearts: but the words of our Lord are still verified in every place; nor can any wisdom or prudence in the professors of religion exempt them from the reproach connected with it. Amongst other reasons for the aversion of men to Christianity in the first ages, a very prominent one was, that it was an unaccommodating religion, and claimed, not only a

^a ver. 14, 15.^b 1 John iii. 12. Gal. iv. 29.^c Acts vii. 52. and 1 Cor. iv. 9.

pre-eminence above every other, but an exclusive existence in the world. Had the followers of Jesus been content that his name should have been enrolled among the list of heathen deities, they would have been no more hated than the professors of any other religion: and if at this time the followers of Christ would connive at the existence of other tenets and other practices than those which Christianity enjoins, they would be admired, rather than hated, by an ungodly world. But their exclusive claims in its behalf subject them to the fiercest resentment of those who are hostile to its requisitions. Not content with serving the Lord Jesus Christ themselves, they call upon all others to serve him too, and *that* at the peril of their souls: hence all who are determined to follow their own ways must, in their own vindication as it were, condemn those who so greatly differ from them: and hence, as long as that difference exists in the world, the enmity excited by it will operate.]

To fortify us against these trials, our Lord graciously gives us,

II. A consoling promise—

[The expression used by our Lord was proverbial: it occurs in many other parts of Scripture; and signifies, that no real evil shall arise to the person of whom it is spoken. It cannot mean that he shall experience *no* trouble; for in the preceding context it is said; that “many shall be put to death:” but it is equivalent to that expression of St. Peter, “Who is he that shall *harm* you, if ye be followers of that which is good^d?” and it accords with that promise of God by the Prophet Jeremiah, “Turn ye every one from your evil ways, and I will do you *no hurt*.” Two things are implied in it; namely, that no evil whatever shall accrue to the person but by the express permission of God; and that none shall be inflicted, which shall not be over-ruled for his eternal good.

Little do the world think how much their powers are limited by the special providence of God. They boast of their purposes; but find that “wherein they deal proudly, there is One that is above them,” “who disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot perform their enterprise^e.” Laban and Esau menaced great things against the defenceless Jacob; but they could effect nothing: and every believer may address his enemies in the words of Christ to Pilate, “Ye can have no power at all against me, except it be given you from above.”

The Christian's enemies do indeed often appear to triumph: but it is in appearance only, and not in reality; for they can do nothing which God will not “make to work together for good

^d 1 Pet. iii. 13.

^e Jer. xxv. 5, 6.

^f Job v. 12.

to them that love him." If they injure his body, and benefit his soul, what harm do they inflict? If they deprive him of earthly comforts, but occasion him to receive a richer reward in heaven, what loss does he sustain? Verily the efforts of the most malignant amongst them shall only operate as a furnace to purge him from his dross, or as a cross-wind to fill all his sails, and waft him with more rapidity to his desired haven.]

But as flesh and blood must feel, and are too apt to faint, our Lord adds,

III. An encouraging direction—

[*Self-possession* is the privilege of all who trust in God; "They that believe shall not make haste." The unreasonableness of wicked men is apt to discompose us; and their virulence, to grieve us: but by patience we are enabled to bear up against every species of oppression, and to retain the same tranquillity of mind as if we were in a state of perfect ease: "I will keep him in perfect peace," saith God, "whose mind is stayed on me." This then is the direction given us by our Lord, "In your patience possess ye your souls;" "let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing".]

Yield not to irritation. The instant that anger arises in your bosoms, you are "overcome of evil:" whereas your duty is, "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Yield not to dejection. Your trials may be long and heavy, but they are all appointed in number, weight, and duration. See the experience of the Apostle Paul^b: that experience shall be yours; and "your strength shall be according to your day."

Yield not to fear. "Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man, that shall be as grass?" However formidable your enemies may appear, the advice of Peter to you is, "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts^c." "Be careful for nothing;" but "cast all your care on him who careth for you."]

For the CONCLUSION of this subject, we shall,

1. Correct some mistakes in relation to it—

[Religious people are apt to imagine, that every cross which they are called to bear, is the cross of Christ; and that they should use no means to avoid it: but it is no uncommon thing for them to bring trials upon themselves by their own imprudence, or perhaps even by very reprehensible misconduct.

^c Jam. i. 4.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 8—10.

^c 1 Pet. iii. 14, 15.

Of such St. Peter speaks; contrasting their sufferings with those which are endured for the name of Christ; and affirming, that their troubles are a ground of shame rather than of glorying^k. It would be well if those who make religion a pretext for neglecting their relative duties, would consider this; for, whatever they may imagine, their cross is not the cross of Christ, but *their own*; nor will it ever bring either honour to God, or benefit to themselves. Moreover, if a cross be really coming upon us for the name of Christ, we may without any impropriety endeavour to avoid it. We must not indeed sacrifice a good conscience, even for the avoiding of death itself. Daniel would not so much as shut his window when he prayed, because it would have been a denial of his God^l: but our Lord told his Disciples, that "if men persecuted them in one city, they should flee to another:" and Paul on many occasions fled from his enemies, and made considerable sacrifices to abate their prejudice^m. Thus also should we act: we should be careful never unnecessarily to bring a cross upon ourselves; we should even use any prudent means to avoid the cross of Christ: but when we have no alternative but to bear it, or to make shipwreck of a good conscience, then we must "take it up," and "glory in it."]

2. Suggest some considerations for a suitable improvement of it—

[First: If all men conspire to hate and persecute the Disciples of Christ, *let the Disciples at least take care to love one another, and to strengthen each other's hands by a firm and indissoluble union amongst themselves*. The ungodly will triumph not a little, if they can see Christians quarrelling among themselves, and hating and reviling each other — — —

Next; *Let us duly reflect whose cross it is that we are called to bear*. Did we but consider what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us, we should account no cross heavy, nor any affliction long — — —

Lastly; *Let us look forward to the eternal world*: there, all our trials will be compensated; and "our light and momentary afflictions be recompensed with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" — — —]

^k 1 Pet. iv. 14—16.

^l Dan. vi. 10.

^m Acts ix. 25. and xxi. 21—26. and xxiii. 6.

MDLXXII.

THE BUDDING FIG-TREE.

Luke xxi. 29—31. *And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

IT was no small advantage to our Lord's stated followers, that they could ask him more particularly respecting any thing which they did not perfectly understand. Of this privilege they often availed themselves, and obtained satisfactory information on many important points. Our Lord told them that the time was coming when that temple, which they so much admired, should be utterly destroyed. This was so contrary to their expectations, that they begged to know both the period to which he referred, and the particular signs whereby its approach might be ascertained. To this our Lord gave a very full reply; and illustrated his discourse by a parable taken from the season of the year, and, most probably, from the prospect then before their eyes. This parable, with the application of it, shews us,

I. That we ought to notice the signs which God has given us—

There is scarcely any thing needful for us to know, which is not discoverable by certain signs even before it actually exists, or is fully accomplished. We may notice this,

1. In the works of nature—

[Our Lord justly observes that the seasons which succeed each other do not come upon us unawares, but manifest their approach by certain signs. The prophet describes the very birds of the air as instinctively observing their appointed times^a—. And it is of the greatest importance to us in all our agricultural and commercial concerns to do the same. Indeed, if we should neglect such precautions, we should deprive ourselves in many instances of the comforts, if not the necessities, of life.]

^a Jer. viii. 7.

2. In the works of Providence—

[Those great dispensations referred to in the text were, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. The time when they were to take place was to be known, by impostors arrogating to themselves the Messiah's office; by bitter persecutions raised against the Church, and lamentable apostasies occasioned by them; by destructive wars on earth, and tremendous signs in heaven; and particularly by the Roman standard being planted upon holy ground, when their armies should enclose and besiege Jerusalem. It was of infinite moment to the Church to notice these signs; for, on their observation of them, under God, depended all their safety: and their attention to them enabled them to embrace the interval, when the siege was raised, to effect their escape; whereby *they* were preserved, while the whole nation besides were left to suffer the greatest extremities.

The signs of other times are not so clearly marked; and therefore cannot be so confidently interpreted: but it is wise to notice them with care; and our Lord warns us that our observations on the weather will turn to our condemnation, if we do not endeavour to improve with equal diligence our observations on the works of Providence^b.]

3. In the works of grace—

[The conversion of the soul is preceded by many symptoms from which we may form a reasonable judgment. When we behold an humiliation for sin, a teachableness of mind, a love to ordinances, a diligence in duties, a renunciation of the world, and other similar marks, we may augur well respecting the event: and it is desirable to attend to these symptoms, because we may often derive from them a comfortable hope, when other circumstances might be ready to overwhelm us with despair. Our Lord himself formed his judgment upon these grounds; and we shall turn our observations to good account, if we follow his example^c.]

Though we are liable to mistake when we have not God for our guide, yet we are sure,

II. That whatever God has signified to us in his word shall in due time be accomplished—

The destruction of the unbelieving Jews, and the redemption of the Church from the midst of them, were emblematical of the judgments that would be executed, and the salvation that would be vouchsafed,

^b Matt. xvi. 2, 3.

^c Mark xii. 34.

in the last day. Indeed, the two periods are so interwoven in our Lord's discourse, that it is not easy to separate them. We may well therefore fix our attention on those events wherein we are all concerned ;

1. The final destruction of God's enemies—

[This is foretold in unnumbered passages of Scripture ; and the judgments, which are now executed in the world, are so many presages of a future retribution. Whatever people may imagine, this awful event shall come to pass. The Jews supposed that, because they professed the true religion, they should never experience the threatened calamities : but, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, "wrath came upon them to the uttermost." Thus it shall be with all the ungodly. In vain are all their hopes founded on their external relation to Christ : the word of God will be fulfilled in its season ; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it fail^d.]

2. The eternal salvation of God's elect—

[This is asserted with the same frequency and clearness as the opposite truth : and too often is it questioned by persons through the prevalence of unbelief. There may be indeed great, and, humanly speaking, insurmountable obstacles in the way. As the Christians were enclosed by the besieging army, yet escaped at last through the most unaccountable and impolitic conduct of the Roman general in intermitting the siege, so shall some way be found for the salvation of God's people : they may be hemmed in on every side ; yet shall not God's purposes of love be defeated, or the "smallest grain of pure wheat ever fall to the ground".]

This subject may be further IMPROVED,

1. In a way of conviction—

[It becomes us all to inquire what is to be expected from the signs that manifest themselves in us ? Is the fig-tree budding, and are the trees putting forth their leaves ? or, are they stripped of their foliage, and assuming daily a more dead and barren appearance ? Are our graces, though small, growing in beauty and fruitfulness ; or are we mere cumberers of the ground, that bring forth no fruit to God ? From these things we may know the present, and augur the future, state of our souls. O let our minds be open to conviction ; and let conscience do its office.]

2. In a way of consolation—

^d ver. 32, 33.

• Amos ix. 9.

[We are "not to despise the day of small things." Let us be thankful if there be "*some* good thing found in our hearts." Summer comes not all at once; but, if the symptoms of it appear, we may wait with joyful expectation: and if the good work be begun in our hearts, we may be confident that God will carry it on, and perfect it to the day of Christ^f.]

^f Phil. i. 6.

MDLXXIII.

OUR LORD'S EATING THE LAST PASSOVER WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

Luke xxii. 14—16. *And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve Apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*

SUPPOSING the Holy Scriptures to have been written by divine inspiration, and Jesus Christ to have been the Son of the Most High God, we should expect that every thing related of him would have the stamp and character of his perfections. There would be a consistency in all that belonged to him: in what belonged to him as God, he would appear as God; and in what belonged to him as man, he would be found altogether pure and spotless. This consistency we do find; nor does he ever for a moment say or do any thing which is not worthy of himself. The time is come for his celebration of the Passover, on the very night previous to his death. He orders his Disciples to go into the city, and make ready for him. But where shall they go? He bids them enter into the city, and inform a person whom they shall meet bearing a pitcher of water, that their Master would eat the Passover at his house; and he assures them that the person will, without hesitation, shew them a large upper room furnished, and affording every accommodation that they can wish. Nor need they send any person to tell him what house they are at, as he will be in no danger of wanting any such information. Here we see him, as the omniscient

God, declaring with infallible certainty the most contingent events: and when he comes to his Disciples, behold, he forgets all his own approaching sufferings, and is intent only on promoting their eternal welfare. The last evening was arrived, when he was to conflict with all the powers of darkness, and to be delivered into the hands of sinners. This he well knew; and therefore, one would suppose, should have greatly dreaded the approaching hour: but, instead of dreading it for himself, he earnestly desired it for their good: "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not eat any more thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Here two inquiries arise; and they will afford a profitable subject for our present contemplation?

I. Why did he so desire to eat the Passover with them at that time?

Many reasons doubtless conspired to make him so desirous of it. It would afford him a valuable opportunity

1. Of manifesting his love to them—

[Parting friends are usually anxious to give to each other some lasting token of their mutual regard. Our blessed Lord, in particular, was glad to avail himself of the opportunity which the Paschal feast would afford him for this purpose. That feast was attended with repeated washings of the hands of him who presided at it: but our Lord, having his Disciples alone with him, instead of washing his own hands, took a towel, and girded himself, and washed their feet: nor would he suffer any one of them to decline accepting this token of his love: so anxious was he to convince them all, that "having loved them, he loved them to the end^a." Nor did he by this action merely express to them his own love, but shewed them what sentiments they should entertain towards each other, and towards all his people to the end of time: they should account no service too humiliating to perform for the lowest member of his mystical body; but every one should make it the summit of his ambition to become the servant of all.]

2. Of conveying instruction to their minds—

[They had been frequently informed of his approaching

^a John xiii. 1.

sufferings and death; insomuch, that though they did not fully comprehend these predictions, they were much troubled and perplexed in relation to them. They were now, like ground that has been ploughed up, and watered with plenteous rains, prepared to receive into their bosoms the good seed, the word of life. Our Lord therefore now opened to them, more fully than on any other occasion, all the deepest mysteries of his religion. He told them plainly who he was, even one with the Father, insomuch that "whosoever had seen him, had seen the Father." He told them also, whither, and for what end, he was going; even to his Father's house, "to prepare places for them." He told them, that his departure was altogether "expedient for them;" so that if they considered it aright, instead of mourning on account of it, they would rejoice: for that he would send to them the Holy Ghost to be their abiding Comforter and Guide: yea, he himself would hear and answer every petition that they should present to the Father in his name; nay more, though removed from them as to his body, he would come and manifest himself to them, and even dwell in them, by his Spirit. He opened to them also the nature and intent of his death, which was to procure "for them the remission of their sins;" and shewed them, that, notwithstanding his removal from them, they should be united to him as branches to the vine, and, by constant communications of grace and strength from him, be enabled to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory. In a word, in his discourses at this feast, he brought forth every subject which their necessities required, and presented it in such a view as should most conduce to their lasting edification and comfort^b.]

3. Of commending them to God in prayer—

[Doubtless he had oftentimes prayed with them: but this last prayer was peculiarly tender and impressive. It is the delight of pious friends, when parting to meet no more, to commend each other into the hands of their common Father, in the hope and prospect of seeing each other again in a better world. Thus did our blessed Lord on this occasion. He had taken the charge of his Disciples in this world, and had kept them all in safety, the traitor alone excepted, according to the predictions concerning him: and now he entreats his Father to keep them; that, through their ministrations, his name may be made known to the ends of the earth; and, through their exalted love and piety, the whole world may have an evidence, both of the truth of his mission, and of the sanctifying

^b Read attentively the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of St. John.

efficacy of his religion. And, that they might have the fuller assurance of meeting him again in a better world, he prays, or rather, I should say, he declares it to be his unalterable *will*, that they all should be with him in that kingdom to which he was going, and should behold his glory there for ever and ever*. Surely they never could forget that prayer so solemnly offered, so tenderly expressed, so richly fraught with instruction and heavenly consolation.]

4. Of preparing them fully for his departure—

[His approaching sufferings must of necessity prove a great stumbling-block in their way. But when they should recollect what he had told them previously to his death, their hopes would revive, and they would be encouraged to expect the full accomplishment of all his promises. To produce this effect was a very principal object of this last discourse^d: and how completely it was attained, the Apostles themselves inform us: they thought his former discourses had been obscure parables in comparison of this: but this appeared to them simple and intelligible; insomuch that it removed all remaining doubt from their minds respecting his Divine mission^e. It is true, we find, that, on the apprehension of their Lord, they all forsook him and fled; and for some time they scarcely knew how to believe the joyful tidings respecting his resurrection from the dead: but, from the moment that they were convinced of that fact, we see a steadfastness in them which was evidently the result of these previous instructions; and their whole future lives demonstrated what unspeakable benefit they had received from them.]

Such were the grounds, we conceive, on which our Lord so earnestly desired to eat the Passover with them at that time. We are next to inquire,

II. Why he determined to eat it with them no more—

If he had pleased, he might have continued upon earth after his resurrection, or come down again from heaven at that season of the year to eat it with them again. But, independent of many other considerations, there were two reasons in particular, why he would not celebrate with them that ordinance any more:

1. Because it was now about to be fulfilled and abrogated—

* See the 17th chapter of St. John.

^d See John xiii. 19. and xiv. 25. and xvi. 4, 33. and xvii. 13.

^e John xvi. 28—30.

[The Passover was instituted only for a time, till the more perfect dispensation of the Messiah should be introduced. For both *the occasion of that ordinance, and the ordinance itself*, were altogether typical. The occasion of that ordinance was the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, which was typical of the redemption of the world from sin and Satan, death and hell. The Paschal Lamb also, which was to be roasted, and eaten with bitter herbs, and not a bone of which was to be broken, was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to endure the extremest agonies both of soul and body as a sacrifice for sin, yet was not to have one bone of his body broken. To the completion of this type in the Lord Jesus Christ the Apostle Paul bears witness, saying, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast." This therefore was the deliverance which was henceforth to be celebrated in the Church; and in comparison of it the deliverance from Egypt was no more to be remembered^f — — From this time the shadows were to flee away, seeing that the good things which they prefigured were now arrived: the new covenant, with every thing relating to it, was now established; and therefore the old covenant, with all its carnal ordinances, having waxed old, was to vanish away^g.

Now it was of great importance to the whole Church that this matter should be fully understood: and therefore our blessed Lord informed his Disciples, that, since "the Passover would now be fulfilled in the kingdom of God," or in the dispensation which he was about to introduce, there would be no more occasion for the Jewish rites and ceremonies, not even for that which was the most solemn and sacred of them all^h.]

2. Because other memorials of his love were now to be established—

[The Lord's Supper was now instituted for the purpose of exhibiting to the world the wonders of his love, and of perpetuating in the Church the remembrance of it to the end of time. In the breaking of the bread, was represented the rending of his body on the cross; and in the pouring out of the wine, the effusion of his blood: and the partaking of those sacred elements which nourish the body, represented the nourishing of our souls by a believing application to Christ as our atoning sacrifice. This is the feast which his people are now to keep: of this all are to partake, provided they desire to have redemption through his blood, and can partake of it with the bitter herbs of real humiliation. *This feast he will keep*

^f Jer. xxiii. 5—8.

^g Heb. viii. 13.

^h The word "*until*" does not import, that our Lord would keep the feast *after* it had been accomplished in him, but that he *never* would keep it again. It is an Hebraism, frequent in the Scriptures.

with us; not indeed by his *bodily* presence, but by that which is infinitely more important, his *spiritual* presence with our souls: "I will come unto you," says he, "and *sup* with you, and you with me." Nor was this the privilege only of his own immediate Disciples, but of all who shall believe in him through their word: "Lo," says he, "I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How earnestly should we desire communion with Christ!

[Did he forget all his approaching sufferings, that he might instruct and comfort his Disciples? O how should we rise above all considerations, whether of pain or pleasure, to enjoy fellowship with him! How should we seek instruction from him as the first and greatest of all blessings! I am far from saying that we should neglect any earthly duty whatever; but we should consider every thing in this world as altogether worthless in comparison of him: joys should be no joys, any further than they will consist with a sense of his love; nor should sorrows be regarded for a moment, if they be endured for his sake, or can be rendered subservient to his glory. To hear his voice, and learn his will, and taste his love, and follow his steps, and secure a participation of his glory, *this* should be our one desire, our continued labour, our supreme delight.]

2. How delighted should we be with the thoughts of death!

[At death, this whole work of redemption will be fully completed. *In Christ* it is completed *now*; in *us* it will not be fully completed, till all the remains of sin are done away. That will take place at the moment of our release from this mortal body: and then we shall keep the feast in a better manner. Our Lord has taught us to expect a renewal of this feast in the realms above: he has told us, that "he will drink of new wine with us in his Father's kingdom¹." O what a feast will that be! We need not envy then the beloved Apostle, who at the Last Supper lay in his Saviour's bosom: for we ourselves shall, like Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, recline upon the bosom of our blessed Lord. Should we not then look forward to that time with holy desire, "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of our Lord?" Should not the language of us all be, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly?" Let not death, which is to introduce us to such bliss, be formidable in our eyes: but let us be anxious only to be counted worthy of that honour which he has prepared for us, and be "longing to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ."]

¹ Matt. xxvi. 29.

MDLXXIV.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LORD'S DEATH FORE-ORDAINED.

Luke xxii. 22. *Truly the Son of Man goeth, as it was determined^a.*

THE doctrine of predestination is very mysterious. If it be so held as to destroy the free agency of man, it must be pernicious and false: but it cannot be denied without denying also the omniscience and immutability of God; nor, if properly understood, is it at all inconsistent with the responsibility of man. If we know not how to reconcile all the difficulties that arise from this doctrine, it is not *therefore* false. Certain it is that Judas was punished, and that eternally^b; nor can we doubt but that the Judge of all the earth will do right^c: yet his sin was among the things which had been fore-ordained. To this effect St. Peter speaks respecting the Jewish nation at large^d: to the same purpose our Lord speaks of Judas in particular^e.

I. Our Lord's death in general was fore-ordained—

No unprejudiced person can entertain a doubt of this truth: there are innumerable proofs of it in the Holy Scriptures.

Our Lord's death was fixed before the foundation of the world—

[God foresaw the fall of man from eternity: he from eternity also determined to restore man again to his favour. The mean, by which he resolved to effect it, was the death of his own Son. Hence the Apostle speaks of Christ as “fore-ordained,” &c.^f—]

* Another exordium might be to this effect:—[Persons educated in the Christian religion, take for granted that it is true; whilst yet they know but little how to defend it against the assaults of infidels. But it is desirable that we should all be conversant, in some degree at least, with the evidences of its truth. I will therefore set before you somewhat of the evidence that arises from the accomplishment of prophecy, and especially in reference to the death of Christ as being altogether decreed and determined by God.]

^b Mark xiv. 21.

^c Ps. cxlv. 17.

^d Acts ii. 23.

^e The text.

^f 1 Pet. i. 20.

It was predicted soon after man had fallen—

[God denounced a curse against the serpent. In that denunciation he foretold the destruction of Satan himself: he foretold it as to be effected by the death of Christ^g.]

It was shadowed forth in a variety of types—

[The paschal lamb represented it^h: it was prefigured by the daily sacrificesⁱ: it was typified by the offerings on the great day of atonement^k. The serpent in the wilderness was a striking representation of it^l.]

It was foretold by all the prophets—

[The prophetic writings are full of declarations respecting it. Isaiah seems rather to have composed a history than a prophecy. To quote particular passages is needless. St. Peter mentions it as foretold by all the prophets^m—. Our Lord himself speaks to the same effectⁿ—.]

A body was prepared him on purpose that he might die—

[He freely undertook to suffer in our stead^o. This was the ground on which a body was provided for him^p. This reason for his incarnation is often noticed in the Scriptures^q—.]

It was foreknown and consented to by our Lord himself—

[Our Lord often spake of it to his Disciples^r: it was the subject of his conversation with Moses and Elias^s. He could have delivered himself from his enemies if he had chosen it^t: but it was a season he greatly longed for^u.]

Hence we may conclude, that though the agents were guilty, as having acted freely, the actions themselves were fore-ordained^x. But there was not merely a decree respecting our Lord's death in general;

^g Gen. iii. 15.

^h 1 Cor. v. 7.

ⁱ John i. 29.

^k Heb. ix. 13, 14.

^l John iii. 14.

^m Acts iii. 17, 18.

ⁿ Luke xxiv. 25—27.

^o Ps. xl. 6—8.

^p Heb. x. 5—7. The Apostle explains the expression in Ps. xl. 6. "Mine ears hast thou opened," by other words to the same effect, "A body hast thou prepared me." The boring the ear of a servant bound him to his servitude for ever; Exod. xxi. 6. And the preparing of a body for Christ fixed him to his engagements.

^q Heb. ii. 9, 14.

^r Luke xviii. 31—33.

^s Luke ix. 31.

^t He had frequently done so, Luke iv. 29, 30. John viii. 59. and he could easily have done it then, John xviii. 6. Matt. xxvi. 53.

^u Luke xii. 50.

^x Acts iv. 28.

II. Every particular respecting it was determined—

It would be endless to enumerate all the predictions respecting Christ, and to compare them with his history⁷; but we will point out a few that relate more immediately to *his death*:

1. Those that were immediately to precede his death—

[It was foretold *by whom* he was to be *betrayed*^a. Our Lord himself applies this prediction to Judas^a—*The price that should be paid for his blood, together with the disposition of the purchase-money, was accurately foretold*^b. This very sum (the price of a slave) was paid, and afterwards so applied^c. It was moreover foretold that he should be *scourged*^d. This was complied with to *prevent his death*^e. He was also destined to be *mocked, spit upon, and smitten*^f. His enemies vented their indignation in this very way^g—.]

2. Those that were to accompany his death—

[It was foretold that he should be *nailed to a cross*^h. The accomplishment of this was very singularly effectedⁱ. He was to be crucified *with others, malefactors*^k. The fulfilment of this also is particularly noticed^l—*He was to experience fresh insults* here^m. This was fulfilled in the most literal mannerⁿ. He was also to suffer *the hidings of his Father's face*^o. David's words were those used by Christ under his dereliction^p—*He was to have vinegar offered him to drink*^q: he would not resign his breath till this was accomplished^r.]

3. Those that were immediately to follow his death—

[He was to be *pierced*^s. This was fulfilled in a very remarkable manner^t; yet he was *not to have a bone broken*^u.

⁷ Matthew alone quotes above thirty passages that refer to Christ.

^a Ps. xli. 9.

^b John xiii. 18.

^c Zech. xi. 12, 13.

^d Matt. xxvii. 6—10.

^e Ps. cxxix. 3. and Isai. liii. 5.

^f Luke xxiii. 22.

^g Isai. l. 6.

^h Matt. xxvii. 26—30.

ⁱ Ps. xxii. 16.

^j John xviii. 31, 32, Crucifixion was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment: yet he was put to death for a crime of which the Roman law would not have taken cognizance.

^k Isai. liii. 12.

^l Mark xv. 27, 28.

^m Ps. xxii. 6—8.

ⁿ Matt. xxvii. 41—43.

^o Ps. xxii. 1.

^p Matt. xxvii. 46.

^q Ps. lxix. 21.

^r John xix. 28—30.

^s Zech. xii. 10.

^t John xix. 34, 36.

^u Exod. xii. 46. This was very unlikely to be fulfilled, seeing that many of his bones were out of joint, Ps. xxii. 14. and the bones of those who were crucified with him were broken.

This, too, received its accomplishment^x. *The manner in which his clothes were to be disposed of* was also foretold^y. The fulfilling of this strongly marked the overruling hand of God^z.]

We may say of every the most minute circumstance, as St. Matthew does^a—

INFER—

1. How certainly is Jesus the true Messiah!

[Such a variety of circumstances could not have concurred but from the express determination of Providence. Let us then receive Jesus as the promised Messiah: let us welcome him with acclamations and hosannas: let us depend upon his death as a sure ground of hope — — —]

2. How cheerfully may we leave ourselves to God's disposal!

[How were the malice of Satan, the envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, &c. overruled for the effecting of the Divine purposes! Thus may God overrule the most adverse circumstances for our good. Let us then in all states rely on that gracious declaration^b.]

^x John xix. 32, 33, 36. ^y Ps. xxii. 18. ^z John xix. 23, 24

^a Matt. xxvi. 56. ^b Rom. viii. 28.

MDLXXV.

REWARD OF FAITHFULNESS.

Luke xxii. 28—30. *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

AT the close of his life, our blessed Lord was peculiarly engaged in comforting and encouraging his Disciples. This appears particularly in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of St. John's Gospel. But in the passage before us it appears still more remarkably; because he had, at this time, great reason to be displeased with them: and yet he overlooks their offence with the most slight and transient notice; and administers consolation to them, as if they had deserved nothing but applause. Yet we are not to

suppose that the words of my text are to be confined to them: they are applicable to all Christ's faithful servants. And, to place them in their true point of view, I must consider them,

I. As addressed to the Disciples then before him—

[There are difficulties in the words: but those difficulties will vanish, if we bear in mind the precise circumstances under which the Disciples were, at the time when these words were delivered.

Our Lord had now kept the Passover with his Disciples; and had instituted his Last Supper, which, under the Christian dispensation, was to supersede the Passover. In explaining to them the nature and intent of this new ordinance, he had compared the bread, which he brake, to his body, which was to be broken on the cross; and the wine, which he poured forth, to the blood which was about to be shed upon the cross for the sins of the whole world. But, in speaking of these things, he twice mentioned "the kingdom of God, which was about to come," and which was to be the completion and consummation of all that he had undertaken to effect*. The Apostles, passing by all that their divine Master spake concerning his own sufferings, caught hold of the idea of "the kingdom of God," in which they hoped for advancement upon earth; and immediately began to contend with each other for pre-eminence in that kingdom; each specifying the grounds on which he himself claimed a priority above the rest. Our Lord reproved this ambition in the same kind of way as he had before done^b; but still forbore to dwell upon it, that he might comfort and support them under the accumulated weight of trouble which they were now immediately to sustain. He told them, that, whilst many had forsaken him, *they* had continued with him through all his temptations; and that therefore he would act towards them as the Father himself had acted towards him; and would fulfil all their desires to an extent of which they could now form no conception. Did they desire pre-eminence in his kingdom? They should all be admitted, not to the table of earthly princes merely^c, but to the table of the King of kings, to eat and drink in his presence: yea, they all should possess kingdoms, and sit on thrones: and, though they should themselves stand for a time at the tribunal of wicked men, and receive a sentence of condemnation from them, they should have all the tribes of Israel, standing as it were, at their tribunal, and receiving, to a certain degree, their sentence from them, who, as assessors with Christ, should approve and applaud

* ver. 16, 18. ^b Matt. xx. 20—28. with ver. 25—27.

^c 2 Sam. ix. 9, 10. and xix. 28.

the sentence passed upon them. This I conceive to be the true sense of the last clause of my text; which was intended to fortify them against all which was about to be realized in their Lord, and which they themselves also were, in due time, destined to experience.]

But we must further consider these words,

II. As addressed to his faithful followers in every age—

There is, between them and the Apostles, a great resemblance:

1. They answer to the same character—

[Though Christ himself is out of the reach of men, his word, his cause, his people, are treated precisely as he was in the days of his flesh. "Was he despised and rejected of men?" So is his Gospel, wherever it is proclaimed. It is "to some a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness," as much as ever. Nor is there, in the whole universe, a faithful servant of his who has not a cross to bear for his sake. But they are all firm in their Master's cause: they suffer nothing to turn them aside from following him: yea rather, instead of being intimidated by sufferings, they rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame, or even death itself, for his sake — — —]

2. For them, also, are reserved the same honours—

[At the table of the Lord above is Abraham sitting, and Lazarus next to him, with his head, as it were, reposed on Abraham's bosom^d. And there shall every true Disciple feast with his divine Master for evermore^e — — — To them, also, shall be assigned "thrones and kingdoms," even as God the Father has assigned them to his well-beloved Son. It is *by an express covenant* that these were given to Christ^f; and *by covenant* does Christ also confer them on his people: they "inherit a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world." And they, too, shall be assessors with Christ in judgment. Of *this* there can be no doubt. St. Paul says to the Church at Corinth, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? yea, know ye not that we shall judge angels?" What then shall influence us, or what shall we regard in comparison of these things? Let us be content to hunger now, if we may but feast then: and if called to surrender thrones and kingdoms, and to lay down our lives as martyrs, let us willingly make the sacrifice, knowing how abundantly we shall be recompensed through eternal ages — — —]

^d They reclined on couches at their feasts.

^f This is the force of *ἐκτίθηται*.

^e Rev. xix. 9.

^s 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3.

Suffer ye now, brethren, a word of EXHORTATION—

1. Adhere with firmness to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Many forsook him in the days of his flesh — — — and many, at this day, like the stony-ground hearers, fall away in a season of temptation and persecution. But “be ye steadfast and immoveable,” even to the end; “following the Lord fully,” and “cleaving to him with full purpose of heart” — — —]

2. Expect with confidence his promised blessings—

[Think of the state to which many whom you once knew on earth are now exalted in heaven: and think in how little a time you also will be partakers of the same blessings. Know, that, if ye be Christ's, all these things are yours, secured by a covenant that cannot be broken. What glory can this world give you, in comparison of this? Contemplate this: follow this: anticipate this: and you need not fear what either men or devils can do unto you.]

MDLXXVI.

THE MEANS OF SECURITY FROM SATAN'S MALICE.

Luke xxii. 31, 32. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*

THE agency, or even the existence, of evil spirits is scarcely credited amongst us; but there is nothing more certain than that they exist, and act in the world. To conflict with them, constitutes a principal part of the Christian's warfare^a; and to be aware of their devices is no inconsiderable attainment in Christian knowledge^b. There is however a Being who is able to counteract their agency: and of this we have a proof in the history before us. Satan, the prince of the devils, meditated the destruction of Peter. Our Lord with affection and earnestness warned Peter of his designs; and, by his own intercession, secured him against his assaults.

I. The malice of Satan—

Satan is the great adversary of mankind—

^a Eph. vi. 12.

^b 2 Cor. ii. 11.

[He was once as bright a morning star as any in heaven. But he rebelled against the Most High, and incurred his displeasure^c. Full of hatred against God, he sought to efface his image from our first parents. Through subtlety he prevailed to the destruction of them and us^d. Nor does he cease to assault those who through grace are restored.]

He desires to agitate and distress them—

[This is evidently implied in the expression in the text. He has various ways of effecting his purpose. He may harass us with temptations and persecutions: he may perplex us by artful insinuations and suggestions. His efforts were exerted against all the Apostles^e: but the more eminent any are, the more they are hated by him. Peter was distinguished for his knowledge and intrepidity^f: yea, he had had a peculiar honour conferred on him^g. On this account Satan's malice raged against him more especially.]

But his ultimate end is to prove them hypocrites, or to make them apostates—

[This was evidently his design in assaulting Job^h, and in asking permission to try the Disciplesⁱ. Nor would he leave one faithful person upon earth. "As a roaring lion he seeks to devour all". He can do nothing indeed but by Divine permission^k: but if suffered to fulfil all his will, he would destroy every soul. His influence on the herd of swine shews what he would do to men^l: not one vassal of his would escape the fate of Judas^m.]

But God has not left his people without means of resistance—

II. Our security from his assaults—

God has both armed his people for the combat, and given them a great Deliverer—

Faith is the grace whereby he enables us to maintain our stand—

[It was by faith that we were translated from Satan's

^c 2 Pet. ii. 4.

^d 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^e Ὑμας.

^f Matt. xvi. 16.

^g Matt. xvi. 18.

^h Job i. 9, 11. and ii. 5.

ⁱ Ἐξήρατο seems to imply a kind of challenge, as in the case of Job, wherein he undertook to prove them to be but chaff, if God would suffer him to make the trial.

^k He could not afflict Job more than God saw fit to suffer him: nor could he enter into the swine without our Saviour's permission, Matt. viii. 31.

^l Matt. viii. 32. ^m Compare Luke xxii. 3. with Matt. xxvii. 5.

kingdom into Christ's^a. It is by that also that our daily warfare is to be carried on^o. Yea, through that are we to attain our full and final salvation^p. Faith is the shield whereby alone we can ward off the darts of Satan^q: if that fail, we are exposed to the fiercest assaults of our enemy. If we lose our hold of the promises, we shall be driven away as chaff: we shall have no point around which to rally our scattered forces. Whereas, if faith be strong, we shall hope even against hope^r; and, though wounded, we shall return with fresh vigour to the combat. Nor shall our great adversary be able to prevail against us^s. Hence that earnest caution against unbelief^t— and that express direction respecting the mode of opposing Satan^u—]

But the intercession of Christ is necessary to uphold our faith—

[Peter's faith would have failed utterly, if he had been left to himself; but through the intercession of Christ he was preserved. Thus we also should "make shipwreck of our faith." But our prevailing Advocate pleads for us also^v: as our High-Priest he bears us on his breast-plate before the throne^w: he obtains for us fresh supplies of the Spirit. In this way he, who has been the author of our faith, will also be the finisher^x. Hence the encouragement given us to rely on the intercession of Christ^a— Hence the encouragement given us to regard it under every backsliding^b— Hence the encouragement given us to rest assured of Christ's power to save^c—]

INFER—

1. What need have we to be ever on our guard!

[Perhaps at this moment Satan may be desiring to sift us. And what if God should give us up into his hands? If suffered to exert his strength, he could soon dissipate whatever is good in us; nor should our past zeal in God's service remove our apprehensions; *that* would rather provoke Satan to more activity against us. Let us then "not be high-minded, but fear." Let us follow the salutary advice which our Lord has given us^d. Let us plead with fervour those important petitions^e— At the same time let us "put on the whole armour of God," and prepare, as God has taught us, for the assaults of our enemy^f.]

2. What a mercy is it to have an interest in Christ!

^a Gal. iii. 26.

^q Eph. vi. 16.

^r Heb. iii. 12.

^s Exod. xxviii. 29.

^t 1 John ii. 1.

^u Matt. vi. 18.

^o 2 Cor. i. 24.

^p Rom. iv. 18, 20.

^q 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

^r Heb. xii. 2.

^s Heb. vii. 25.

^t Eph. vi. 13—18.

^v 1 Pet. i. 5.

^w Rom. x. 11.

^x John xvii. 20.

^y Rom. viii. 34.

^z Matt. xxvi. 41.

[They who know not Christ, are wholly under the power of Satan^s; but they who are Christ's, have a watchful and almighty guardian. Our Lord provided for Peter's safety, before Peter even knew his danger. Thus "will he keep the feet of all his saints." He will suffer none of them to be plucked out of his hand^b. If he permit Satan to sift them, it shall be only for the removing of their chaff¹. He has pledged his word for the security of the weakest of his people^k. Let us therefore commit ourselves entirely into his hands. Let us beg him to remember our unworthy names in his intercessions, and to deal with us as with Joshua of old^l—]

^s 2 Tim. ii. 26.^b John x. 28.¹ Compare 2 Cor. xii. 7. with Heb. xii. 10, 11. ^k Amos ix. 9.^l Zech. iii. 2—4.

MDLXXVII.

CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS IN THE GARDEN.

Luke xxii. 39—46. *And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives; and his Disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his Disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

IT was foretold of the Messiah, that he should be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:" and we are informed that he had scarcely come into the world before his life was sought for, and he was carried by his parents a fugitive to a foreign land, in order to escape the cruel effects of Herod's jealousy. During the four years of his ministry, much is told us of his trials: but the principal scene of them was reserved for the close of his life. We propose to contemplate them, from their commencement in the garden of Gethsemane till the time that he expired

upon the cross. At present we shall confine our attention to the words before us; in which we may see,

I. The tremendous sufferings of our Lord—

Now, beyond any former period of his life, “were the troubles of his heart enlarged.” That I may bring them before you the more distinctly, I will call your attention to three things;

1. The terms by which his sufferings are described in the inspired volume—

[If we look into the *Prophets* who foretold those sufferings, we shall see that they almost exhaust the powers of language in order to convey some idea of their inconceivable greatness. The Psalmist, personating the Saviour, says, “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid: the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me^a.” “My heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me; and horror hath overwhelmed me^b.” “The waters are come in unto my soul: I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God^c.” To mention only one passage more, the Saviour complains, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death^d.” Who that reads such passages as these, is not prepared for that distressing appeal, “Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger^e?”

The *Evangelists* also, in their report of these sufferings, vie with each other in the extraordinary force of the words by which they endeavour to express them. St. Matthew speaks of him as so surrounded with grief, as to be brought by it into the utmost dejection and consternation^f. St. Mark uses one term which implies a high degree of fear, and terror, and amazement^g; and another denoting the utmost excess of grief and anguish^h. St. John also expresses his sufferings by a

^a Ps. xviii. 4, 5. ^b Ps. lv. 4, 5.

• Ps. lxix. 1—3.

^d Ps. xxii. 14, 15.

• Lam. i. 12.

^f παράλυτος, Matt. xxvi. 38. with Ps. xlii. 5. ^g ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι.

^h ἀδημονεῖν, Mark xiv. 33. See Bishop Pearson on the Creed, p. 190.

word of exceeding strength to denote the extremity of his troubles¹; and St. Luke, in my text, tells us he was in an agony, in the greatest possible straits in his conflict². In fact, "his soul was exceeding sorrowful *even unto death*." And the depth of his sufferings will further appear from,]

2. The effects produced by them—

[It must be remembered that as yet no *man* had inflicted on him any pain at all. Yet we behold him deprecating his present sufferings in the most earnest way imaginable, even "with strong crying and tears¹," renewing his entreaties again and again, not only on his knees, but in a posture of the most abject prostration^m: yea, and we see him "sweating great drops of blood" from every pore of his body through the excess of his agony. What an idea does this give us of the intensity of his sufferings!

It will be asked perhaps, Why should HE, whom we believe to be God, as well as man, betray such a fear and dread of sufferings, which thousands of martyrs have sustained with cheerfulness; and why, when he had voluntarily undertaken to endure them, should he afterwards deprecate them with such extreme fervour? I answer, Martyrs in *their* sufferings have had to bear only what could be inflicted by *men*; whereas the Saviour had to endure the wrath of *God*, even the penalty which was due to the sins of the whole world: and, in deprecating that misery, he acted precisely as it became him to act both *as a man*, and as *a good and holy man*. *As man*, it was quite allowable to him to deprecate sufferings which he had not deserved; and *as a good man*, it became him to deprecate the wrath of God. These two things therefore he did: but he did them with most unreserved submission to the will of God; and thereby gave to us the most perfect pattern of resignation under sufferings of whatever kind.

But we may further learn the greatness of his sufferings from,]

3. The means used for his support—

[At the commencement of his ministry, when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, "angels were sent from heaven to strengthen himⁿ" And thus it was in this his last hour, which was more especially "the season when all the powers of darkness assaulted him^o;" an angel was sent from heaven to administer to him that strength and consolation which he needed after so severe a conflict^p. What an idea does this

¹ *τεράσασται*.

^m Matt. xxvi. 39.

^p ver. 43.

^k *ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ*.

ⁿ Matt. iv. 11.

¹ Heb. v. 7.

^o ver. 53.

give us of his sufferings, when he who was God as well as man, needed such assistance to sustain and support him in that dread hour!]

But how were his three favoured Disciples occupied in the mean time? He had bidden them to watch and pray with him: and "had gone only about a stone's cast from them," that he might with the more liberty pour out his soul before God. But alas! the Saviour's sorrows were yet further increased by,

II. The lethargic indolence of his Disciples—

It might have been supposed that they, at such a season as this, would have been particularly wakeful and earnest in prayer—

[Their Lord had counselled them to employ this time in prayer, not only in interceding for him, but in imploring strength for themselves, that they might be able to sustain the trials which were now coming fast upon them. But they were so overpowered with sleep, that notwithstanding they were again and again awakened by their Lord, they were no sooner left to themselves than they fell asleep again. "Not a single hour could they watch with their Lord," notwithstanding all their recent protestations and professions. The fact was that they were "overcome with sorrow," which, in some cases, when it is exceeding deep, operates as a blow, that, for a season, only stuns and stupifies. The whole of our Lord's late conversations with them respecting his approaching sufferings and death had altogether oppressed their minds, so that they were no longer able to exercise their faculties as the occasion required. "Their spirits were willing; but their flesh was weak."]

This ill-timed somnolency added yet further to the sufferings of their Lord—

[He did indeed administer reproof to them with the utmost tenderness, and even apologize for them, as he afterwards did for his very murderers. But to be so neglected by them in this his last extremity, and to behold them so indifferent about him, and so careless about themselves, after all the exhortations he had given them, must have occasioned him the most poignant grief; and still the more, when he saw that the time for prayer was now lost, and that the traitor, with his armed bands, was at hand, to deliver him up into the power of his blood-thirsty enemies.

We are told indeed, that "they knew not what to answer him^a." And well might they be confounded, when they saw

^a Mark xiv. 40.

how shamefully they had violated their obligations to their divine Master, and how regardless they had been of their own eternal interests. And what shall we ourselves answer in the last day, when called to account for our present carelessness in the midst of all the warnings that are given us, and the dangers to which we are exposed? Verily, whatever excuses we may *now* make, our mouths will *then* be shut: and to all eternity shall we reproach ourselves, that when we could watch whole nights about our temporal concerns, as the Apostles had done with their nets, we have not been able to “watch with Christ one single hour” in fervent and persevering prayer; so “stupid have we been and brutish, even as beasts before him.”]

May we not SEE from hence, my brethren,

1. How terrible we shall find it to bear the penalty due to sin!

[If it so oppressed and overwhelmed our incarnate God, what will it effect in us? “If it so consumed the green tree, how will it burn up the dry!” I tremble to think how careless all around us are, when in a few more days or hours they may have to sustain without any alleviation, and to all eternity, the wrath of God. Dear brethren, though your Lord bore in his own sacred person all your sins to make atonement for them, his atonement will be of no avail to you, unless you repent of your sins, and plead the merit of his blood for the expiation of them. No indeed, all that the Saviour has done and suffered for you will but aggravate your guilt, if you lose your present opportunity of calling upon him for the pardon of it. Do not, I pray you, give way to a sleepy careless state of mind. You have been again and again called, in order to awaken you; and if you continue with folded arms to waste, as it were, your day of grace, death will ere long come, with irresistible energy, like Judas with his armed bands, and transport you to the bar of judgment, where nothing but condemnation will await you, and the wrath of an offended God. O that to-day, while it is called to-day, you may arise and call upon your God, that so iniquity may not be your ruin! But, if you will “sleep on now and take your rest,” wonder not if you be left, like Peter, to deny and forsake your Lord, and to perish with Judas, under an accumulated load of guilt and misery.]

2. How different a cup God is willing to put into our hands!

[Our blessed Lord prayed, that, “*if it were possible*, the cup of bitterness might pass from him.” But God had decreed, that, “without shedding of blood there should be no remission

† Luke xxiii. 31.

of sins;" and therefore if the Lord Jesus would be a surety for us, he must discharge our debt; and consequently, if he would take the cup out of our hands, he must drink it for us. And drink it he did, even to the very dregs. And now, brethren, he puts into our hands the cup of salvation, with all its inconceivable and eternal blessings. O drink ye of this, and let your souls live for ever! I will not promise that you shall never in this life taste of the Saviour's cup of sorrows. You may taste of it; you may even drink deeply of it, in order that you may be the more conformed to him. But of this I assure you, that, however bitter a cup God may at any time put into your hands, *there shall be no wrath in it*, no, *not a drop of wrath*: it shall all be sweetened with love: it shall be altogether medicinal, and not penal. And, to counteract its bitterness, there shall be put into your hands "a cup of which the Lord himself shall be the portion*." Yes, the Lord Jesus drank the one, that you might drink the other. Only believe in him; and trust in him; and cleave to him; and watch and pray with him; and all the blessedness of heaven shall be yours. And when the cup of God's wrath shall be put into the hands of the impenitent and unbelieving to drink to all eternity†, the cup of salvation shall be yours, and "the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore."]

* Ps. xvi. 5.

† Rev. xiv. 10.

MDLXXVIII.

THE TREASON OF JUDAS.

Luke xxii. 48. *Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*

VIRTUE is best discerned when it is subjected to the heaviest trials. The stroke of the hammer displays the excellence of the diamond; and the furnace ascertains the purity of the gold. Meekness and patience are mere dormant qualities, till injuries or misfortunes call them into exercise. Let our character be blasted, our interests ruined, our person injured; and then it will appear how far these qualities exist within us, and to what extent they will enable us to support our burthens. Had our blessed Lord himself been viewed in a season of perfect tranquillity, his unrivalled glories would have shone only as the sun behind a cloud: but when he laboured

under severe and complicated afflictions, then his brightness beamed forth in its meridian splendour. His circumstances were peculiarly painful at the time when he uttered the words before us. He had been sustaining a conflict with all the powers of darkness, and drinking that cup of wrath which his Father had put into his hands. He had seen with grief the supineness of his three Disciples, who, notwithstanding his repeated warnings, had consumed in sleep the time which should have been spent in watchfulness and prayer. To add to his sorrows, Judas now approached him at the head of an armed band, and by a treacherous kiss betrayed him into their hands. Behold then our Divine Master under these accumulated troubles! What might we expect to hear from him on this occasion? Methinks his address to Judas, whose treachery he was aware of, could be no other than that of Paul to Elymas the sorcerer, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness," art thou come to betray me? But however this address became an Apostle, when zealous for the honour of his Lord, the Saviour himself, when personally interested, saw fit to speak in milder accents, that he might set an example to his followers to "shew all meekness to all men:" "Friend," says he, "wherefore comest thou?" "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"

We shall consider these remarkable words,

I. In reference to the traitor Judas—

That we may have a just view of the wickedness of Judas, let us notice,

1. The light he resisted—

[He had attended our blessed Lord during the whole course of his ministry: he had heard all his discourses; and had received from him in private a further exposition of the truths which had been more obscurely delivered to the proud, captious, and malignant auditors that flocked around him. He had seen innumerable and most beneficent miracles wrought in confirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus; so that there could be no doubt upon his mind but that Jesus was "the Son

of Man," "the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Had he entertained any secret suspicions that Jesus was an impostor, he would have had some excuse for his treachery: or if he had enjoyed but few opportunities of instruction, his guilt would have been less heinous. Pilate, who was an ignorant Heathen, sinned grievously in not executing strict justice: but the sin of those who had delivered Jesus unto him was incomparably greater*, because of the superior light which they enjoyed. In this view therefore the sin of Judas was exceeding great.]

2. The obligations he violated—

[Judas was "one of the twelve," who were called to a more intimate acquaintance with our Lord; and was selected from among them to be his purse-bearer and almoner. He had been sent out, like all the other Apostles, to preach the Gospel, and to work miracles in the name of Jesus. He had seen diseases and devils yielding to his word; and had probably been instrumental in converting others to the faith of Christ. How was he bound then to "shew all good fidelity," and to maintain to the uttermost his Master's cause! But besides all this, Jesus, within the space of a few hours, had acted towards him the part of a menial servant, and had condescended to wash his feet: should not such love have called forth his tenderest and most faithful regards? Moreover, Judas had, on that very occasion, pledged himself to die with Jesus rather than *deny* him: yet behold, this man, almost immediately after uttering these words, leaves the room, in order to *betray* his Lord! What impiety was here! If woe was denounced against Chozazin and Bethsaida for not improving the mercies vouchsafed to them, what woes must belong to this unhappy man for violating the strongest obligations which could lie upon him!]

3. The manner in which he violated them—

[Jesus, it should seem, had permitted his Disciples to express their regards to him by the affectionate and endearing token of a kiss: and this was the sign by which Judas undertook to betray him into the hands of his enemies! What horrid perfidy! to make an expression of love and friendship a signal for his apprehension!

But mark the peculiar aggravations with which this perfidy was attended! It was altogether a *voluntary* act. The Chief Priests and Elders could never have entertained a thought of prevailing on one of Christ's own Disciples to betray him: they could expect nothing from them but the most vigorous and determined opposition. Methinks they could scarcely believe their own senses when they heard the traitor Judas making

* John xix. 11.

the proposal. If indeed they had seized on Judas, and threatened to put him to extreme torture if he would not further their designs, we might offer some little excuse for him: but who could conceive that the proposal should originate with him, and that he should be a volunteer in such a service?

It was *immediately* after he had received an *express* warning respecting it. Our blessed Lord had, but a few hours before, told his Disciples that one of them would betray him: and upon being interrogated by each of them, "Lord, is it I?" he told them all, that it was the person to whom he should give the sop^b; and told Judas in particular that it was *he*; and that since he was thus bent on the commission of this sin, it would have been better for him that he had never been born^c. Would one not have supposed that such a warning should have diverted him from his purpose? Yet, instead of being checked by it, he went out "*immediately*" under the cover of the night, that he might execute his plot without delay.

We cannot but be astonished for *how small a consideration* he was induced to do this. Had he been promised great riches, sufficient to keep him in opulence and splendour all his days, we should have wondered less at the power of the temptation: but it was only "thirty pieces of silver^d," (the price of a slave,) that he was to receive for his recompence: so little a value did he set upon his master's life.

The diabolical malignity which he expressed on the occasion, is a yet further aggravation of his guilt. When agreeing with the Chief Priests, he gave them a strict charge, "Take him, hold him fast, lead him away safely^e." As Ahithophel, the treacherous friend of David, counselled the rebellious Absalom: "Give me twelve thousand men, and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and I will smite the king only^f;" so did Judas respecting the true King of Israel: he reminded the Chief Priests how often he had escaped out of their hands; and, that they might secure him now, he charged them to use the utmost vigilance and circumspection.

Such was the sin of Judas; a sin unparalleled in the annals of the world.]

Let us now extend our views, and consider the text,

II. In reference to traitors of every description—

Though the precise sin which was committed by Judas never was, nor will be, committed by any other,

^b John xiii. 26.

^c Matt. xxvi. 21—25.

^d Compare Zech. xi. 12, 13. with Matt. xxvi. 15.

^e Matt. xxvi. 48. Mark xiv. 44.

^f 2 Sam. xvii. 1, 2.

yet are there too many who follow his steps, and betray the cause and interests of *their Divine Master*. There are different kinds of traitors :

1. Infidel—

[Many pretend to be followers of Christ, and yet deny every fundamental truth of his religion. The fall of man, and the guilt and corruption consequent upon it ; the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ in the place of sinners, and our reconciliation to God by the blood of his cross ; the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, together with all the inward life and power of godliness ; all these, I say, are denied and held up to ridicule and scorn : and yet the people, who thus expunge from their system almost every doctrine that distinguishes our holy religion, will call themselves Christians. But are they really friends of Christ? Are they not rather enemies and traitors? Even the followers of Mahomet express as much regard for Christ as they: the Mahometan allows that Christ was a prophet; and what do these infidels allow him more? Truly their kisses are perfidious; their professions are a lie.]

2. Antinomian—

[There are two kinds of Antinomians ; systematical, and practical : the former are very zealous for the peculiar doctrines of Christianity; but they carry them to an undue extent; and erase from their system all the obligations of the moral law. We hope and believe, that all who embrace this system are not so regardless of the law in practice, as they are in theory : nevertheless their sentiments are most pernicious; and their professed attachment to Christ is constructive treason. It is certain that, however exemplary some of these persons may be, others (and we fear by far the greater part of them,) take encouragement from these licentious tenets to live in sin. If they do not give way to those grosser propensities which would expose their profession to universal contempt, they are at least distinguished by a proud, contentious, worldly spirit, and by irreverence and undue confidence in their transactions with God.

As for practical Antinomians, the great majority of nominal Christians are of this class. They object not to the leading truths of the Gospel: having been educated in the belief of them, they acknowledge them as points which they are not disposed to controvert. But to yield to their influence, and to bring their souls to a state suited to them, they have no mind. They wish for nothing beyond this world, they think of nothing but what relates to the body. Whether their outward conduct be more or less correct, they consider it as of

very little importance. Some can run to the greatest excess of riot, being wholly addicted to worldliness or dissipation, and yet account themselves very good Christians. Others, who are restrained from such excesses, can content themselves with "a form of godliness, while they utterly deny its power;" and though they never smite upon their breasts with contrition, never flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, never devote themselves in earnest to the service of their God, they imagine that all is well, and that they are to be reckoned among the friends and followers of Christ. But their profession serves only to lower Christ in the estimation of the world, and in many instances to fill heathens themselves with an utter abhorrence of his name.

We must acknowledge, indeed, that neither the one nor the other of these characters have the malignant designs of Judas: but the ultimate effect of their conduct is to betray him with a kiss.]

3. Hypocritical—

[These come the nearest of all to the character of Judas: and many there are to whom this designation properly belongs. In every age there have been some who have joined themselves to the Church, while yet they felt only transient impressions, and had no root of grace in their hearts. Of them, some cast off all profession of religion, and go back again to the world: others continue their profession, but indulge habits altogether inconsistent with it*. Hence they are found deceitful in their words, dishonest in their dealings; and less worthy of confidence than the generality even of avowed worldlings. For a time they wear the mask with success: but at length their true character appears; and they make religion "to stink in the nostrils" of all who know them. It is almost superfluous to say that these are traitors: for they not only deliver up Jesus to the scorn and contempt of his professed enemies, but lay a stumbling-block in the way of his friends, and cause many to wax cold in their attachment to Christ, if not also utterly to renounce him. "Woe unto the world because of them! but woe be more especially to those by whom the offence cometh!" In a little time, if they repent not, they will "go to their own place," and participate with Judas the just reward of their deeds.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us not be offended with religion on account of the faults of those who profess it—

[It would manifestly be absurd to make the treachery of

* Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

Judas a reason for rejecting Christ: for the Scriptures, yea and Christ himself, foretold, that "one who should eat bread with him should lift up his heel against him." And do not the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament declare, that "false brethren should come in," and that "by means of them the way of truth should be evil spoken of?" The very existence therefore of traitors and hypocrites in the Church, is a proof of the truth of our religion; and should confirm, rather than weaken, our attachment to it. If indeed the Gospel gave licence to such characters, that very circumstance would be a just ground for doubting its Divine authority, and withholding from it our approbation: but if it invariably inculcate holiness both in heart and life, then let the blame of hypocrisy rest on those only who are guilty of it; and let the offence that is occasioned by some, be a stimulus to others to adorn the Gospel.]

2. Let us watch against our besetting sin—

[Judas from the very beginning was addicted to covetousness. To gratify this propensity, he took advantage of his office as the purse-bearer to steal from time to time a part of the money entrusted to his care. Had he been told on the first occasion to what this covetous disposition would ultimately lead, how little would he have been able to credit the assertion! But thus it is with sin; it is like a breach in a bank, which, if not stopped at first, will soon be widened by the current, till the whole country is overflowed. When once a man harbours any secret lust, it will gather strength, and gradually obtain an entire ascendant over him. Whatever, then, be our besetting sin, whether lewdness, or covetousness, or any other, let us watch and pray against it; lest we prove at last a scandal to our profession, and, after having instructed others, ourselves be cast away.]

3. Let us get a real and firm attachment to Jesus Christ—

[There is a sense in which we may say to all of you, "Kiss him, apprehend him, hold him fast." The Psalmist bids us to "kiss the Son, lest he be angry;" St. Paul speaks of "apprehending that for which he had been apprehended of God in Christ Jesus;" and exhorts us to "lay hold on the hope set before us." We are commanded also to "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." And should not we be as earnest in this good work as Judas and his band were in their evil work? If they plotted by day, and watched by night, to destroy the Lord Jesus, should we be averse to labour and watchfulness, to obtain an interest in his salvation? Let

us get a love to him in our hearts as deeply rooted as their enmity against him was, and we shall account nothing too much to do or suffer for him; nor will the whole world be sufficient to suspend or lessen our fidelity in his service]

MDLXXIX.

THE HEALING OF MALCHUS' EAR.

Luke xxii. 50, 51. *And one of them smote the servant of the high-priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.*

IT is but too common for even good persons, who are of a sanguine temper, to ask instruction or advice, while by their conduct they evince that they have very little disposition to receive and follow it. We do not wonder that Pilate should ask, "What is truth?" and go away before an answer could be given him: but it is grievous to see one of Peter's eminence, who had been favoured with so many opportunities of divine instruction, affecting to seek direction from his Lord, and instantly prosecuting his own unhallowed will. In considering the instance recorded, it will be proper to notice,

I. The indiscretion of Peter—

Peter, in striking Malchus with the sword, was evidently actuated by a love to his Master, and a zeal for his service; yet his mode of discovering his affection was certainly deserving of blame. It argued,

1. A want of Christian temper—

[Christianity does not preclude men from taking the sword in defence of their country, when called to it by imperious necessity, and authorized by the civil magistrates: but it enjoins individuals rather to suffer patiently the persecutions with which they are assaulted, and gladly to endure the loss of all things, even of life itself, for the Gospel's sake. As for taking up arms *against* the civil power, it is an extremity which perhaps not any thing can justify. Yet this is the very thing that Peter did; and as he did it without any express command, he was rebuked by our Lord, and told that "all, who should take

the sword in that manner, however they might think they were fighting the Lord's battles, should perish with the sword^a.”]

2. An ignorance of the prophetic writings—

[It had been foretold that “one, who had eaten bread with our Lord, should lift up his heel against him;” and that, in consequence of his treachery, he should be “led like a lamb to the slaughter,” and “be numbered with transgressors.” Had Peter fully understood those prophecies he would not so rudely have contradicted our Lord on a former occasion^b, or so impetuously defended him on this; but would have submitted to the will of God, saying, “The cup which his Father hath given him shall he not drink it?”]

3. A forgetfulness of our Lord's character—

[Often, yea, but a few minutes before, had Peter seen his Lord performing the most stupendous miracles^c. If these had been wrought by the Father's power, could not Christ call upon him now, and have more than seventy thousand angels sent for his defence? If Christ wrought them by his own power, could he not deliver himself out of their hands without Peter's interposition? But if Christ were abandoned by his Father, and reduced to a state of impotence himself, could Peter protect him against a band of armed men? Was not his furious assault rather calculated to increase their rage, and to make them destroy Jesus and all his Disciples upon the spot? In every view his conduct was wrong; for if aid was needed, his was insufficient; and if it was not needed, it was officiously and imprudently obtruded.]

The contrast between Christ's conduct and Peter's will appear by considering,

II. The remedy which our Lord applied—

Jesus would give no just occasion of offence to the civil magistrate, and therefore set himself instantly to remedy the evil that had been committed—

[Peter had cut off the ear of the high-priest's servant, probably because he was most active and forward in apprehending our Lord. But Jesus would not suffer even that small injury to be sustained on his account: he therefore “touched” the wound, and restored the ear to its perfect state. What a marvellous return was this for all the indignities which this miscreant had offered him! If Jesus had chosen to work a

^a Our Lord in his answer to Peter pointed out the various sources of his misconduct. See Matt. xxvi. 52—54.

^b Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

^c John xviii. 5—11.

miracle on this occasion, one would rather have expected that it should be such an one, as should make the "ears of all that heard of it to tingle." But mercy was his delight; and the more unworthy the objects of his mercy were, the more did he glory in displaying "the unsearchable riches of his grace" — — — Would one not at least hope that this miracle should disarm his enemies, and make them desist from their purpose? But, alas! nothing can prevail with those who are given up to judicial blindness^d — — — The manner of working the miracle was scarcely less remarkable than the miracle itself: for he not only performed it unsolicited, but even asked permission to perform it; saying to those who were binding him, "Suffer ye thus far," "loosen my hands for one moment, that I may exercise them in one more act of benevolence before your eyes." What astonishing meekness and condescension! — — — Thus, while he more than recompensed the injury that Peter's indiscretion had occasioned, he shewed to his enemies, that his surrender of himself was voluntary; and left to his people a most perfect pattern for their conduct when persecuted by an ungodly world.]

From this history we may LEARN,

1. To guard against an indiscreet unhallowed zeal—

[Zeal properly directed, is amiable and praiseworthy^e; but a "zeal without knowledge" is most injurious to the Christian cause. Paul's conduct in his unconverted state, and the request of two of our Lord's Disciples, may serve to put us on our guard against the fatal mistakes into which even good men may fall^f. Let our zeal be ever tempered with love, and regulated by the Holy Scriptures; else, while it carries us too far on some occasions, it will prove, like Peter's, miserably defective upon others^g.]

2. To exercise love towards our most inveterate enemies—

[The Christian's "weapons are not to be carnal," nor must he "war after the flesh." He is to turn the right cheek to him that smites him on the left," and, by rendering good for evil, to "heap coals of fire on the head of his enemies." "Instead of being overcome of evil, he is to overcome evil with good^h." Christians, see if this be your conduct — — — And remember

^d *e. g.* Pharaoh was alike uninfluenced by judgments or mercies.

^e Gal. iv. 18.

^f Gal. i. 13. Luke ix. 54.

^g Mark xiv. 71. Such persons are compared to "a cake not turned," which, instead of being equally penetrated with heat, is burnt up on one side, and scarcely warmed on the other. See Hos. vii. 8.

^h Rom. xii. 19—21.

that "Christ set you an example that you should follow his steps¹."]]

3. To trust in Christ for the healing of the wounds which sin has made—

[No sword can inflict so deep a wound as sin has made. It were a light matter if it had merely killed the body: it has inflicted a mortal wound on our souls. But Jesus can heal us; nor should any sense of unworthiness prevent our application to him. Let us go to him, and he will add us to the number of those whom he has made monuments of his almighty power and his unbounded mercy — — —]

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

MDLXXX.

PETER'S FALL AND REPENTANCE.

Luke xxii. 61, 62. *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

THE fidelity of the sacred historians is a strong argument for the truth of what they wrote, and for the divine commission which they bore. Had they been impostors, they would never have recorded all their own failings in such an artless and faithful manner. A greater blemish could scarcely exist in the character of an Apostle, than that which is here exposed: and yet it is not only mentioned by all the four Evangelists, but St. Mark, who wrote his Gospel under the immediate inspection of St. Peter himself, is most diffuse in aggravating the crime, and most reserved in noticing the repentance: he tells us of Peter's oaths and curses; but observes only, that he wept: whereas St. Luke, who omits the former, tells us, that he wept "bitterly." The immediate occasion of Peter's repentance is mentioned only by St. Luke. It should seem, that his heart was affected by the expressive look which our Lord gave him.

It will be useful therefore to inquire,

I. What that look expressed—

We may be certain that there was nothing vindictive in it—

[Never on any occasion did our Lord assume a menacing tone towards those who injured him: "when he suffered, he threatened not." When Judas came to betray him, he saluted the traitor by the tender appellation of Friend; "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" When the people came to apprehend him, he only asked whom they sought? and then told them, that he was the person. Yea, in the midst of all the torment and ignominy of crucifixion, he extenuated the guilt of his very murderers, and prayed to his heavenly Father to forgive them. Justly indeed might he have looked on Peter with anger, and have intimated, by an indignant aspect, that he, who now thus basely denied his Master, should speedily be denied by him at the bar of judgment. But, as no such words ever escaped his lips, so no such disposition ever manifested itself in his looks: he was altogether meek and silent, like a sheep before her shearers, or a lamb led to the slaughter^b.]

Nevertheless it, doubtless, conveyed a reproof to Peter—

[We may conceive, that our Lord intended to remind him of his folly in boasting, and of the presumption he had manifested, in declaring that, though all the Disciples should deny their Master, he never would; and, that he would rather die with him than deny him. Such a reproof was necessary: but still it was expressed only in a look: and how different was it from the rebuke given him on another occasion! When Peter, though in real kindness, desired to divert his Lord from the thoughts of suffering, Jesus, in righteous displeasure, said, "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me^a." But, when Peter wished to shrink from sufferings himself, even though, in order to avoid them, he denied his Lord with oaths and curses, the severest reproof that Jesus gave him, was, a look, a gentle intimation, that he had fallen by his own vain confidence and self-dependence.]

But the principal thing expressed in that look, we apprehend to have been pity and compassion—

[Having nothing revealed respecting this, we can only speak from conjecture. But, if we may be permitted thus to interpret a look, which perhaps no words could *fully* express, we may suppose it to have intimated somewhat to this effect: 'Ah! Peter, see the sad consequence of trusting in yourself. See how you have not only dishonoured me, but wounded your own soul. But still, though your sin is so great, do not give

^a Matt. xxvi. 50.

^b Isai. liii. 7.

^c Matt. xvi. 23.

way to despair. You will soon hear, into what a dreadful measure Judas has been precipitated, through a sense of guilt, and a despair of mercy: but be sure you do not imitate him. I told you before, that I had prayed for you^d; now then go, and pray for yourself: only repent, and you shall even yet find mercy, yea, and be restored to the office which you have so disgraced: return, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely^e: go instantly, and cry unto God for pardon; and all shall yet be well with you, both in time, and in eternity.']

That something inexpressibly moving was intimated in that look, cannot be doubted, if we consider,

II. What effect it produced—

A voice from heaven could not have been attended with a more instantaneous or powerful effect on the mind of Peter:

1. It brought his sin to remembrance—

[It is astonishing to see how awfully the conscience even of a child of God may, on some occasions, be lulled asleep. David, after his fall, seemed wholly insensible of his wickedness, for no less than nine months. While he was disposed to punish, with most excessive severity, a crime of infinitely less enormity than that which he had committed, he appeared unconscious of having himself contracted any guilt at all^f. Thus it was with Peter on this occasion. He had denied his Master; he had repeated that denial with yet greater vehemence; and no less than an hour had elapsed without his discovering any signs of penitence and contrition^g. His heart even seemed to be more and more hardened: for, not contented with continuing to deny his Lord, he added oaths to his protestations, and perjury to lies.

And is it not thus with too many professors of religion, who allow themselves in pride, envy, malice, wrath, covetousness, impurity, or some other secret evil, and go on from year to year without being sensible that they have done any thing amiss? Perhaps there may be instances, wherein even a follower of Christ has acquired unjust gains, defrauding his customers by false weights and measures, or by bad commodities: defrauding the revenue too by withholding customs, and taxes, that were clearly due. O that the consciences of all such persons might be awakened from their lethargy, and be excited to remonstrate against such unchristian practices!

But this look of Jesus brought to Peter's mind the warnings

^d Luke xxii. 32.

^e Hos. xiv. 4.

^f 2 Sam. xii. 1—7.

^g ver. 59.

he had slighted, the vows he had broken, and the complicated evil he had just committed. All his conduct now appeared in its true colours; and he saw himself, as in a mirror, a base, cowardly, perjured apostate.

And such is the effect, which the testimonies of Christ's compassion will produce on all who duly receive them^h ———]

2. It filled him with compunction and contrition—

[Instantly his heart bled with a sense of sin, and was tortured with the bitterest anguish. Had Jesus reproached him with severity, it is probable he would have yielded to despondency, and sought refuge in suicide, from the horrors of a guilty conscience. But the look that pierced his soul poured also a healing balm into the wound. He could now no longer continue in the company of the ungodly, or indulge a vain curiosity respecting the issue of his Master's trial: his heart was now full; and he sought retirement, that he might give vent to his feelings, and implore that mercy which he so greatly needed.

Thus will a view of God's mercy operate on us. Even a wicked Saul, when he saw the lenity and forbearance of David, was overcome with a sense of the kindness shewn him, and lifted up his voice and weptⁱ. How much more should the tender mercy of our God abase us in the dust, and cause the tears of penitence to flow apace! Yes, doubtless, it will instantly lead us from the scenes of folly and dissipation to the more suitable employments of meditation and prayer^k ———]

To IMPROVE this subject, let us consider,

1. To what a shameful state the most exalted Christian may be reduced, if he be left to himself one single moment!

[Who, that had been witness to Peter's confession of Christ^l, or had seen him jump into the sea to embrace his Master^m, or had beheld him wielding a sword in his defenceⁿ, and above all, had heard his promises of being faithful unto death^o, would have supposed that, in so short a time, this most favoured Apostle should so grievously transgress? Let this then be a lesson to us all. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^p." Let every one of us remember, that there is not any sin whatever, which we shall not commit, if we be left to ourselves: and let our daily prayer be, "Hold

^h Ezek. xvi. 60—63.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxiv. 16.

^k Ezek. vii. 16. may, in an accommodated sense, be applied to this.

^l Matt. xvi. 16.

^m John xxi. 7.

ⁿ John xviii. 10.

^o Mark xiv. 31.

^p 1 Cor. x. 12.

thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not; hold thou me up, and I shall be safe^q."]

2. How connected and precipitous are the ways of sin!

[Peter began by indulging a confidence in his own strength: then he followed Jesus "afar off": then he mixed himself needlessly with ungodly company^r: then he yielded to the fear of man: and then he denied his Lord with oaths and curses. And have not we also found that we have proceeded from one sin to another; and that, when once we have given advantage to the enemy, he has prevailed against us in a far greater degree than we ever could have imagined? Let us then inquire, whether there have not been some warnings given us of which we are unmindful; some resolutions, which, having been made in our own strength, we have violated in the hour of temptation? Let us inquire, whether we be not at this moment walking at too great a distance from our Lord? whether we be not influenced by the fear of man? whether we be not associating too much with the enemies of our Lord? or whether there be not some other sin, which we allowedly indulge? Let us remember, that to descend is easy; and that, when we enter on the downward road, none but God can tell where we shall stop^t.]

3. How unbounded is the compassion of our blessed Lord!

[Well might our Lord have exposed Peter to those whom he feared: or rather, well might the insulted Jesus have looked him dead upon the spot, even as Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead with a lie in their mouths^u. But that compassionate Saviour cast only on his apostate servant a look of love and pity; yea, and that too, in the very midst of his sin.

And may we not suppose, that he is at this very moment looking in the same manner on some amongst us, who have dishonoured their profession, and grieved him by their unworthy conduct? Let us endeavour to realize this thought. Let us examine whether there be not a cause, which our blinded consciences have been too backward to condemn? And, if we can find any thing that has grieved his soul, let us instantly go home, and "weep bitterly," till he forgive us. Let us then think on our ways, and turn unto God's testimonies: let us *make haste, and not delay*, to keep his commandments^x.]

^q Ps. xvii. 5. and cxix. 117.

^r ver. 54.

^s ver. 55.

^t Compare Eccles. xix. 1. with Prov. xxviii. 18.

^u Acts v. 1—10.

^x Ps. cxix. 59, 60.

MDLXXXI.

CHRIST'S ACCUSATION BEFORE PILATE.

Luke xxiii. 1—3. *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it.*

UNANIMITY in any cause is no proof that the cause is good: nothing is requisite but to raise an outcry, and the passions of the multitude are soon heated; and, if there be a few artful and designing men to head them, they will concur in measures the most violent, and in acts the most atrocious. Never was this more awfully exemplified than in the conduct of the Jews towards our blessed Lord. Of all the Benefactors that nation ever beheld, Jesus was by far the greatest: yet there we find the whole multitude of the Jews, with the priests and elders at their head, leading Jesus before the Roman governor, in order to obtain against him the sentence of death.

We would call your attention to,

I. The transaction itself—

Here are three things to be noticed;

1. The virulence of the accusation—

[How contemptuously, how maliciously, how falsely, do they speak against him! He *pervert* the nation! Had they called him the Instructor of the nation, the Healer of the nation, the Saviour of the nation, they had done well: but to call him the Perverter of the nation, was a calumny, which one would have thought his bitterest enemies would not have dared to utter. It was not long since the very question had been publicly submitted to him; and his express answer was, “Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s^a.” What he thus enjoined on his followers, he had before sanctioned by his example, having actually wrought a miracle on purpose to pay his tribute^b. And when the people would have taken him to make him a king, he by a miracle rendered himself invisible, and withdrew himself from them^c.]

^a Luke xx. 25.

^b Matt. xvii. 25—27.

^c John vi. 15.

2. The subtlety of his accusers—

[They formed their accusation so as to influence the person whose decision they desired. Before the High Priest, they accused him of blasphemy; but before Pilate, of sedition; that so they might interest the feelings of each, and procure from both a sentence of condemnation against him. Their pretended zeal for the honour of the Roman emperor, was especially calculated to make a favourable impression on him, who, as Cæsar's deputy, now governed Judæa as a province of the Roman empire.]

Their accusation too was founded upon assertions made by our Lord himself. He doubtless had frequently declared that he was the Christ, the King of Israel. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem but four days before, and his approbation of the Hosannas of his followers, amounted to a declaration, that he was the person spoken of by the prophet, "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass^d."

But did he therefore *pervert* the people, or claim for himself the tribute that was due to Cæsar? No: their premises *in a certain sense*, were true; but their conclusions from them were utter falsehood. They knew, however, that logical precision was not wanted in such a cause: when passion and prejudice guide the judgment, a specious plea will pass for substantial reason, and the semblance of truth will operate as forcibly as truth itself; especially where the accuser espouses the cause of the judge, and the accused is represented as his enemy.]

3. The dignity of the accused—

[He preserved silence in the midst of all the accusations which were brought against him; "insomuch that *the governor marvelled greatly*." And well he might marvel, that not a word of anger, or complaint, or self-vindication, should escape him. But Jesus was mute and passive, like a sheep led to the slaughter^e, and "committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

Nevertheless, when interrogated by his judge, he did answer, "Yea," and "witnessed a good confession." "Art thou the king of the Jews?" saith Pilate. "Thou sayest right," replied our Lord; "I am." He would not dissemble, nor for a moment hide such an important truth. He was prepared to endure all consequences, and to yield up his life in the very way that his enemies desired. And, as the Jewish Sanhedrim had already condemned him on his own confession^f, so he was willing that the Roman governor should follow their example. He was alike unmoved by impatience or revenge, by hopes or fears.]

^d Zech. ix. 9.^e Matt. xxvii. 12—14.^f Isai. liii. 7.^g Luke xxii. 71.

II. The improvement that should be made of it—

The followers of Christ are called to tread in his steps. Would we then approve ourselves worthy of that high calling? let us,

1. Expect all manner of evil to be spoken of us falsely for his sake—

[He has warned us plainly to expect it^h: and experience proves that we ought to be prepared for it — — — Our enemies will not only take advantage of any thing we say or do, to build malignant reports upon it; but will be sure to impute our conduct to false principles, and to load our principles with consequences not at all deducible from them. We preach salvation by faith only; therefore we are enemies to morality: “We are instant in season and out of season;” and therefore we are irregular, and enemies to the established Church — — — If they would inquire, they would soon find that the very reverse of what they affirm is true: but they desire our condemnation; and therefore they make up by confidence and clamour, what they want in truth and equity — — — Thus was our Lord himself treated; and “if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household^l.”]

2. Submit with meekness to whatever evils we may be called to suffer—

[Our blessed Lord has suffered, “leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps.” It is true, it is not easy to preserve meekness and resignation amidst all the treatment which we experience from “unreasonable and wicked men:” but we should endeavour to “walk as Christ walked;” and be willing to “be made perfect through sufferings,” even as he was. “Let patience then have its perfect work;” and, when led to indulge an impatient spirit, beg of God to strengthen you with all might “by his Spirit in your inward man” — — —]

3. Be steadfast and immoveable in the maintenance of our principles—

[Many occasions may arise wherein we may be tempted to conceal our principles: but it is better to confess them openly, and suffer for them, than to violate our conscience and offend our God. We are expressly commanded “not to fear man, who can only kill the body; but to fear God, who can

^h Matt. v. 11.

^l See 1 Kings xviii. 17. Jer. xxxviii. 4. Esther iii. 8, 9. Acts xvii. 6, 7. and xxiv. 5.

destroy both body and soul in hell." We do not recommend it to any one to court persecution by a *voluntary* declaration of his principles to those who will only make them grounds of offence; (for that were to "cast pearls before swine;") but whenever *called* to give an account of our faith, let us follow the example of our Lord, and at the risk of our lives "witness a good confession."]

MDLXXXII.

HEROD'S RECONCILIATION WITH PILATE.

Luke xxiii. 12. *And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

IT was truly said of Christ at the time of his birth, that "he should be a sign that should be spoken against, *that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed:*" for by means of him, throughout all his ministry, and especially at the close of his life, such depravity was brought to light, as one would scarcely have conceived it possible for man to indulge. To go no further than the immediate context: Pilate had been constrained to declare him innocent; yet, instead of liberating him, had availed himself of the mention of Galilee to send him to Herod, under whose jurisdiction that province was. The Scribes and Pharisees, enraged rather than pacified by Pilate's attestation of his innocence, followed him to Herod's judgment-seat, loading him with all manner of accusations, and making up in vehemence and clamour what they wanted in truth and evidence. Herod, after trying him, was forced to confirm the verdict of Pilate; yet, instead of protecting this persecuted person, arrayed him in mock-majesty, and with his men of war poured contempt upon him, and sent him back again to Pilate as an object worthy only of derision. Thus, while the Scribes and Pharisees unremittingly urged against him their malignant accusations, Pilate and Herod complimented each other at his expense, and made their injuries to him the means of reconciliation between themselves.

From this last circumstance we notice,

I. That sin is a common bond of union among men—

Sin certainly has produced in families and nations the greatest disunion: and generally causes the fiercest animosities among them that are nearest to each other. But it is also true, that sin often forms a bond of union among men.

1. This is true of sin in general—

[The friendships of the world at large originate almost entirely in sin. The gay unite for the indulgence of their pleasures; the licentious, for the gratification of their lusts; the convivial, for the exercise of (what they call) good fellowship; the worldly and ambitious, for the pursuit of wealth or honour; yea, the very infidels for the purpose of confirming and propagating their fatal tenets.]

2. It is true of enmity against Christ, in particular—

[Persons who have no other point of contact whatever, are brought together by means of this. The Scribes and Pharisees were far from being friends either to Pilate or Herod; and these two were "at enmity between themselves." Yet behold, how they all agree in persecuting Christ! It had been foretold that they would do so^a; and the history before us is declared to be an accomplishment of that prophecy^b. But how can we account for this? How can we account for that union, which has subsisted in all ages between persons of all ranks, habits, and dispositions, in opposing Christ? It can only be accounted for from hence; that every man has in his own bosom a rooted principle of enmity against Christ; and that he will break down all common rules of propriety in order to give it vent: yea, rather than not have confederates in his opposition to Christ, he will associate himself with the vilest of mankind, and avail himself of *any* help for the suppression or extinction of vital godliness.]

But, however desirable the esteem of our fellow-creatures may be, we must say,

II. That friendships cemented by sin are no objects of envy or congratulation—

Doubtless a reconciliation between any parties that are at variance, is desirable. But it may be purchased at too dear a rate:

^a Ps. ii. 1, 2.

^b Acts iv. 25—28.

1. It was so in the present case—

[Pilate and Herod were appealed to as judges; and, when they found the accused person innocent, they should have rescued him out of the hands of his oppressors. It was no fit occasion for paying compliments to each other, when the life of an innocent person was at stake; nor were they at liberty to sport with such sacred interests. And what was the natural effect of this solemn trifling? What, but to encourage each other in sin; to harden each other in impenitence; and to aggravate each other's eternal condemnation? Say now, whether a friendship so formed could afford any solid satisfaction to their minds? Say, whether it would not have been better for Herod to have continued at enmity with Pilate, and even to have subjected *himself* to all manner of indignities for espousing the cause of Jesus, than to have brought such guilt upon his soul for the sake of gratifying a fellow-worm?]

2. It is so, whenever we sacrifice a good conscience in order to obtain it—

[We many conciliate the favour of men by "putting our light under a bushel," and conforming to the maxims and habits of the world. We may make "the world love us, by becoming of the world." Probably many, who would have condemned Demas for continuing faithful to his high calling, commended him when they found that he had relinquished it together with the society of the Lord's people. But what do *we* think of his conduct? or what does he himself think of it now? Has he not learned long since, that the purchase of the whole world at the expense of the soul is an unprofitable bargain? Have not many apostates borne testimony to that effect, even while they have been yet in possession of the things they coveted? Yes; many would gladly have restored, like Judas, their ill-acquired wealth or honour, if they could but regain the peace of mind which they have lost. Know then, that the testimony of a good conscience is the first of blessings; and nothing, not even life itself, is to be desired, unless in perfect consistency with that.]

CONCLUSION—

1. Let us not be surprised if there be confederacies against *us*—

[As long as there continues in the hearts of unregenerate men a principle of enmity against God, we must expect it to operate as it ever has done, and to combine against us all the powers of the world. When the Gibeonites made a covenant with Joshua, all the kingdoms of Canaan confederated to destroy them. Let not us think that the world will be at peace

with us, if we unite ourselves to the Lord Jesus. "The servant cannot be greater than his Lord." When therefore we suffer like indignities with him, let us not account it hard, but rather rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake*.]

2. Let a principle of faith and love unite and animate us—

[We blame not the union of Herod and Pilate, but their union in a bad cause. We have a cause in which it will be our honour to unite; and a principle, which, if truly operative in our souls, will combine us all in the prosecution of the noblest ends. See what an union was produced among the converts on the day of Pentecost^d. O that the Holy Ghost might descend on us also, and that we might be all of one heart and one mind in the service of our God! Then shall we exemplify the change which divine grace effects, and glorify Him who endured such indignities for us.]

* 1 Pet. ii. 19—23. and iv. 12—16.

^d Acts ii. 41—47.

MDLXXXIII.

BARABBAS SPARED, AND CHRIST CONDEMNED.

Luke xxiii. 13—25. *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief-priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto^a him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief-priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

* The marginal translation "by him," is far preferable

THE prophets enter very minutely into the subject of Christ's sufferings, in order that, instead of being led by them to doubt the truth of his Messiahship, we might see in them a demonstration that he was the very person to whom the prophecies referred. But it is not in this view only that we should dwell upon this mysterious subject: many other, and most important, ends are to be answered by the contemplation of his sufferings. We see in them his unparalleled love to us: we see also the desert of sin: and the trials which all his followers must, in a greater or less degree, be called to endure. That part of them which we are now to consider is, his condemnation at the bar of Pilate. Let us notice,

I. The circumstances of his condemnation—

There are three mentioned in our text; and to these we will confine our attention:

1. Pilate's testimony respecting him—

[God so ordered it, that every person who was active in putting our Lord to death, should either directly or indirectly attest his innocence. We forbear to adduce other instances; such as that of Judas, or the Dying Thief, or the Centurion; because in the passage before us we have ample scope for illustrating the observation. Pilate here tells the whole assembly of the Jews, that he had examined Jesus, that he had examined him in their presence, and had inquired into all their allegations against him; and that, after the most careful investigation, he could not find that Jesus had been guilty of any one of those things laid to his charge. He then tells them, that he had sent both the prisoner and his accusers to Herod, who being governor of Galilee, where the crimes were said to have been committed, had the greater right to take cognizance of them; and, being a Jew, must be supposed to be more competent to judge of them, as being more conversant with the Jewish laws and customs than he could pretend to be: but that neither could Herod find in him any crime worthy of death. When he found that these united attestations did not satisfy them, he repeated a second and a third time his declarations, that Jesus was innocent: and he appealed to the whole multitude of his accusers, whether any of them could substantiate so much as one single charge against him. This they answered only by clamours: and thus unwittingly confessed, that they were unable in any single instance to prove their point — — — Thus all, both accusers and judges,

confessed, that though he was to be “cut off, it was *not for himself*,” or, in other words, that “he was the true Messiah^b.”]

2. His ineffectual attempts to save him—

[Pilate, being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, was very averse to condemn him: yet, being afraid of offending the Jews, he did not dare to acquit him. Upon the mention of Galilee therefore, he was glad to get rid of the matter altogether, and to send the parties to Herod, to be judged by him. When this expedient failed, he tried to pacify the people, by offering to inflict on Jesus the milder punishment of scourging; (though he had no right to punish in that manner a person whom he knew to be innocent;) but this would not satisfy them: they thirsted for his blood; and would be satisfied with nothing less. Perceiving that the chief priests and elders were the chief instigators of the people, he tried to secure his object by putting the matter entirely into the hands of the people; amongst whom he supposed Jesus must have many friends. Accordingly he reminded them of a privilege, which by the courtesy of the Roman government they enjoyed, of having one criminal liberated at their request; and, that there might be no comparison at all between the persons presented to their choice, he gave them the option of liberating Jesus, or a noted robber, rebel, and murderer, named Barabbas. This, however, through the influence of the priests, succeeded no better than the former devices. He therefore resorted to one more contrivance. He thought that the people would feel themselves highly honoured if they might on this occasion have their privilege extended to the liberating of two instead of one; and therefore, without expressing it in plain terms, he intimates to them, that if they chose to ask it, he would readily grant their request in favour of Jesus too: “What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ^c?” But all was to no purpose: they were bent upon destroying Jesus, and would listen to no proposal in his favour — — — In their pertinacity however, we see, that though they were free agents, and criminal in the highest degree, they did only what was from eternity fixed in “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God^d.”]

3. His surrender of him to the will of his enemies—

[In proportion as Pilate wavered, the people became more urgent: and they would at last take no denial. Seeing therefore his efforts of no avail, he set the murderer, Barabbas, at liberty, and gave up Jesus into their hands; first, to be scourged, (in hopes that their pity might be moved, when they should see “great furrows ploughed upon his back,”) and then to suffer death upon the cross.

^b Dan. ix. 26. ^c Matt. xxvii. 22. ^d Acts ii. 23. and iv. 28.

Satan, methinks, exulted now in having accomplished the final destruction of Jesus: but little did he imagine, that, whilst he was thus "bruising the heel" of the Messiah, his own head should receive a deadly blow, which he should never to all eternity recover: and that the Messiah's kingdom should be immoveably established, by the very means used to root it out from the earth^c.]

We now pass on to suggest,

II. Some reflections suited to the occasion—

Amongst the multitude of thoughts which such a subject must bring to the mind, we will fix on two or three of the most important:

1. How awful is the depravity of the human heart!

[This we can see in reference to the Jews: but we make a very defective improvement of Scripture history, if we do not use it as a glass wherein to see human nature in general, and our own hearts in particular.

What was the principle by which the priests and elders were actuated on this occasion? It was *envy*: "He knew that for *envy* they had delivered him." And is not that principle in our hearts? Are we not told that "the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" Have Cain, and Ishmael, and Joseph's brethren, none resembling them amongst us? It is true, that men are less conscious of that principle than perhaps of any other: but this arises from its so destroying the characters of those who are exposed to its malignant shafts, as to make them appear *deserving of all the evil* that it inflicts upon them. But though we see not this principle in ourselves, we discover it easily enough in others; and are constrained to confess its odiousness.

And, as the same principle exists in us, so, if Jesus Christ were now to come into the world again, and demean himself precisely in the same manner as he did before, he would excite the same inveterate hatred in us as he did in them. Suppose a poor man laying open the pride, the worldliness, the hypocrisy of all ranks of people, as well among the Clergy as the Laity, and drawing myriads after him from every quarter of the land; would this provoke no enmity: would it beget no murderous rancour in the hearts of those whose hypocrisy was detected, and whose influence was destroyed?

We may go further, and ask, whether the same impious choice be not made at this day as in the days of old? What is the preferring of the ungodly to the godly, and sin to holiness, but a preferring of Barabbas to Christ? Yes; and so common

^c Gen. iii. 15.

Heb. ii. 14, 15.

is this, that the generality of the world would rather be seen in public with a known rake or infidel, than with a man eminent for piety and godly zeal — — —

Behold then, I say, the human heart in general, and your own in particular; and whilst you justly wonder at the impiety of the Jews, learn no less to wonder at, and deplore, your own.]

2. How dangerous an evil is indecision !

[Had Pilate determined to execute justice without regard to consequences, he had never crucified the Lord of glory: but when he listened to the fear of man, and sought to please the Jews, he made a snare for his own feet: he encouraged the importunity which he should have silenced at first, and sacrificed his conscience to a desire of popularity. Unhappy man! what guilt did he contract, and what misery did he treasure up for himself by his want of resolution^s!

Thus it is also amongst us. We hear Christ and his religion vilified, and are afraid to defend them. We see wickedness practised, and are afraid to testify against it. To avoid the ridicule or displeasure of others, we are led into compliances which our conscience disapproves. In short, we are carried oftentimes from one sin to another, through a want of firmness to withstand the tide of fashion and custom. But, brethren, we shall have reason to deplore timidity infinitely more than any consequences which an adherence to duty can ever entail upon us. We all see what Pilate should have done. He should have said, 'I am a judge, and I must decide according to law.' Thus should we say: 'I am a Christian, and I must act according to the Gospel: *that* is my directory; and nothing shall tempt me to depart from it: as for clamour, I regard it not: applause or censure are alike indifferent to me: if God call me to perform a duty, and all the world combine to make me swerve from it, my answer to them is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye:" if I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Jesus Christ.' I mean not that you are to be thus rigid in matters of indifference: but in matters of plain duty, you must "resist unto blood," and embrace death rather than make shipwreck of a good conscience^b.]

^s Acts iii. 13—15. and iv. 27. with Ps. ii. 2, 9.

^b If a third reflection be wanted, it may stand thus: 3. How reasonable is it that we should submit to sufferings for Christ's sake! and then, after representing his submission here manifested, such passages as 1 Pet. ii. 19—24. and iv. 12—16. may be cited to shew, that in suffering for him (provided it be "wrongfully,") we have reason to rejoice, and to account it our highest honour. But this subject occurs elsewhere.

MDLXXXIV.

CHRIST'S ADDRESS TO THE WOMEN WHO LAMENTED HIM.

Luke xxiii. 27—31. *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

ON a cursory view of the subject, it might be thought, that the enemies of Jesus, after having secured their chief object, began to relent; since, instead of obliging him in his debilitated state to bear his cross to the place of execution, (as was customary on such occasions,) they compelled another person to carry it for him. This however was only an additional instance of their malignity. They saw that, in consequence of his watching, and fasting, and diversified sufferings, he was ready to faint; and they began to fear, that he would die before he should reach the place; and consequently that they would be deprived of the satisfaction of making him a public spectacle upon the cross. Hence they spared him this fatigue, that he might be the more capable of suffering all the other miseries which they were about to inflict upon him. Far different was the disposition of Jesus towards them. This short interval he improved for the good of those who were around him. He saw many, and especially some women, making bitter lamentation on his account: and these he exhorted not to weep on his account, but on account of themselves and their children; since the evils reserved for them were both in extent and duration far more terrible than those which he now experienced.

In discoursing upon his words to them, we shall,
I. Explain his counsel—

[It is possible, that some of those whom he addressed were moved to pity him merely from a natural sense of humanity; whilst others were influenced both by faith and love. At all events, we are sure that he did not mean to forbid the exercise of sympathy and compassion; since it was his desire that these amiable qualities should characterize his followers in all ages. Love, in all its branches, was not only enjoined by him, but was distinguished by him as *his* commandment, which he imposed on all who professed themselves his Disciples^a: from whence St. Paul calls it "*the law of Christ*;" "bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^b."

The prohibition was rather of a comparative kind; similar to that expression of the Prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" where sacrifice is not intended to be prohibited, but only to give way, when it should stand in competition with the exercise of mercy.

In this view there was abundant reason for the counsel which Christ now gave them. With respect to himself, they had no such great occasion to weep, because his sufferings were altogether voluntary: they were also now very near their termination; and they would issue both in his own exaltation to the right hand of God, and in the salvation of a ruined world. Hence, if rightly considered, his afflictions, though so exceeding grievous, were grounds rather of gratitude and joy than of regret and sorrow. But the afflictions which in due time would come on them, would be such as had not existed from the foundation of the world, nor ever would be equalled to the end of time. Happy as the Jewish women accounted themselves in having children, they would then congratulate "the barren:" and, desirous as men naturally are of life, they would wish even "rocks and mountains to fall upon them," to put them out of their misery.

This prediction our blessed Lord confirms by a kind of proverb, in which he appeals to the very judgment of those whom he addressed: 'You see,' says he, 'what they are doing to me, who have never given any just occasion of offence: judge then what shall be done to them, when they have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and rendered themselves, like dry wood, proper fuel for the wrath of God?'

These then were the subjects to which he endeavoured to turn their minds, not so much for the purpose of augmenting their sorrow, as of giving it a right direction, and rendering it subservient to their eternal good; for, in proportion as they anticipated the judgments that awaited that wicked generation, they would become penitent themselves, and encourage

^a JOHN xv. 12.

^b GAL. vi. 2.

penitence in others; and thus become instrumental in saving some who were now hardened in their iniquities.]

Having thus explained our Lord's counsel to the lamenting women, we proceed to,

II. Engraft some further counsel upon it—

We might draw your attention to the example of Christ, who even in this hour of his deepest sorrows forgot, as it were, his own personal concerns, and was mindful only of the concerns of others^c. But we shall rather keep in view the subject-matter of his address: in reference to which we would say,

1. Get your hearts impressed with the sufferings of Christ—

[We have before observed, that our Lord did not mean to forbid this, but only to recommend in preference some other considerations, which, under their circumstances, were of more importance. It is true, that under any circumstances, the being affected with the relation of our Lord's sufferings, just in the same way that we should be with any tragical story, will be of little avail. It is not such an impression therefore that we are anxious to produce. We wish you to consider, what was *the end* of those sufferings; and to behold in them, as in a mirror, your desert and danger, your hope and deliverance. Yes; you will do well to contemplate them in this view, till you weep and smite upon your breasts with even greater anguish than his compassionate attendants ever felt. This is the duty of every one amongst us; according to that declaration of the Prophet, "They shall look on him whom they pierced, and shall mourn as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born^d." Indeed, to attain this state of mind, should be the greatest object of our lives; since without it we can have no interest in him; and with it we can never perish. A humble, contrite, and believing view of Christ will infallibly transform us into his image, and bring us to the possession of his glory^e.]

2. Contemplate the probable issue of sin, even in this life—

[It is in the future world that sin will receive its full reward. But it not unfrequently receives a tremendous recompence even here. How many have their health impaired, their fortunes injured, their reputation blasted, and their peace destroyed, by their own folly and wickedness! How many

^c Phil. ii. 4. ^d Zech. xii. 10 ^e 2 Cor. iii. 18. John vi. 40.

mothers have lived to see the child, which they once fondled with the tenderest affection, become a source of unutterable grief: insomuch that they have envied the wombs that never bare! And how many have so embittered their lives, that they have wished for death, and would have been glad to have a rock or mountain to crush them to atoms! There is not a town, or scarcely a village, that will not afford some instances of persons, who, from having ruined their health, their reputation, their fortune, or their peace, do not wish that they had never been born. What is it that makes suicide so common? You will almost invariably trace it to this source: the person's sins have made him so miserable, that life itself is become a burthen to him: so true is that repeated declaration of the prophet, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest; whose waters cast up mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith God, to the wicked^f."

Such are the means by which God often punishes sin in this life. Not unfrequently it happens that the partners of our guilt are made the instruments of our punishment. Thus, in the history before us, the Romans were employed by the Jews in putting Jesus to death; and they were afterwards employed by God in punishing that whole nation, to an extent unparalleled in the annals of the world. Thus also it is often found, that those who have administered to our fraudulent gains or licentious pleasures, are the very persons through whom God visits our iniquity upon us.

Let then the connexion between sin and misery be considered: and learn, that in holiness alone is pleasure to be found without alloy.]

3. Look forward with awe to the future judgment—

[If the Jewish matrons were bidden to weep for themselves and their children, on account of the calamities that should be endured in the siege of Jerusalem, much more may every thoughtful person weep in the prospect of that day, when all shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Then shall every man be recompensed according to his works. How they who have made light of sin in this world will feel in that day, we are informed by God himself; who assures us, that sinners of every rank, from the highest to the lowest, will "cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb^g." The inference which our Lord draws from his own sufferings, in reference to the Jewish nation, may with equal propriety be drawn from his people's sufferings in reference to the world at large. They are, in their measure, persecuted like him; and "if these things be

^f Isai. lvii. 20 ?1.

^g Rev. vi. 15—17.

done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" "If judgment begin at the house of God," says the Apostle, "what must the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" If those who are comparatively as "a green tree" are afflicted by God for *the purging* of their sins, what must not they expect, who, like "a dry tree," are prepared for *the punishment* of their sins? Doubtless their misery will be inconceivably great, insomuch that they will curse their very existence, and wish that by any means they could bring it to a termination¹.

Brethren, know assuredly, that that day will come; and that repentance then will be too late. Then, not they only who crucified the Lord Jesus must give account of themselves to God, but those also who have "crucified him afresh" by continuing in sin². Prepare ye then for that great account; and beg of God, that "when he shall appear, ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless³."

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.¹ Rev. ix. 6.² Heb. vi. 6.³ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

MDLXXXV.

THE GREEN AND DRY TREE.

Luke xxiii. 31. *If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

THE Jews, at this day, know not how to account for the judgments that are upon them. But we can tell them the true reason: it is for the murder of their Messiah. Whilst yet they were in the commission of that act, it was foretold by Jesus himself, that they, even their whole nation, should endure such tribulation as had not been experienced by any people from the beginning of the world; nor ever should again be, as long as the world shall stand^a. He was now, at this time, bearing his cross to the place of crucifixion. And, though the nation at large were gratified at the miseries inflicted on him, there were some whose hearts were tender and compassionate, and who greatly "bemoaned and lamented him." These, however, he exhorted to weep, not for him, but for themselves and for their children; since the

^a Matt. xxiv. 21, 22

days were coming, when they who accounted barrenness so great a calamity, should congratulate themselves upon it; and when, to be crushed to death under rocks and mountains, instead of being dreaded, should be coveted as a blessing^b." His own sufferings were indeed great: but, says he, "If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

Under this proverbial expression he conveyed,

I. A prophetic intimation to that peculiar people—

They were now committing a greater sin than had ever yet been committed on the face of the earth—

[All other sins were light in comparison of this. Nothing had he done among them, but good. Not one amongst them could lay any sin to his charge. His very judge proclaimed his innocence. Yet did they, even the whole nation, rise against him, to put him to death: and when, by reason of their subjection to the Romans, they were unable to gratify their malice to the extent they wished, they delivered him up to the Roman governor, and, by their importunities and threats, compelled him to put him to death. In executing this sentence, they loaded him with every species of indignity, and strove by all possible means to aggravate his sufferings to the uttermost. Hence it may be said of him, "Never was sorrow like unto his sorrow."]

And for this they were doomed to suffer a heavier punishment than had ever been inflicted on any other nation under heaven—

[They were thus ripening themselves for vengeance, which was soon to come upon them to the uttermost. And it was to be inflicted by the instrumentality of that very people by whom they were now wreaking their vengeance upon him. They had proposed to put Jesus to death, "lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation." And God awarded to them, as their punishment, that very judgment which they had sought to avert. Into the hands of the Romans he delivered them; and not less than one million one hundred thousand of them were slain in the siege: the rest were carried captive, or sold for slaves: and from that day to this have their afflictions been continued, with a severity which has marked, in a peculiar manner, the wrath of Almighty God against them. To this hour are they "a reproach, and a hissing," in every quarter of

^b ver. 28—30.

the globe. So that in them is the text fully verified. We have seen what was done in the green tree; and we now see what has been done, and is even yet doing, in the dry.]

But, in these words we may yet further see,

II. A solemn warning to all mankind—

All are fitly compared to “a dry tree”—

[A tree which is dead draws no moisture from the ground; nor does it derive any benefit from the sun and rain. The heavenly influences which nourish and strengthen living trees, serve but to prepare the dead trees as fuel for the fire. What a striking picture does this give us of the Christian world! All who call themselves Christians are planted on the same ground. But the great mass of them are dead. Though, by profession, standing on Christ, and rooted in him, they receive from him no communications of grace or peace. The ordinances which enrich others, impart no blessing to these; but rather tend to render them more dead, and more meet for the fire that shall consume them. Years pass away, and no change, but for the worse, is wrought upon them: so that the very attempt to make them fruitful is altogether in vain.]

And what can be prepared for them?

[What but excision and the fire? They shall not always be left to cumber the ground thus. Look at every individual tree, and you shall see an axe already lying at the root, ready to inflict the fatal stroke, the moment that the expected order for it shall be issued. But, O who can conceive the fierceness of that fire which shall then consume it; or, rather, that shall ever prey upon it unconsumed; the fire itself being never quenched, nor the material that feeds it being ever wasted? In the green tree, the calamities were soon at an end: but to the dry tree, eternity itself shall be the duration of its torments. The things indeed which were done in Christ were inconceivably terrible, notwithstanding his perfect innocence: but, if they were so terrible in him, when sin was only *imputed* to him, what shall they be in those who are laden with iniquities, from their youth up even to their dying hour? Verily, no tongue can utter, no imagination can conceive, the miseries that await those who, in the midst of all the advantages of Gospel ministrations, continue dead in trespasses and sins.]

Sufficient has been spoken for the explaining of the text, both in its prophetic import and its more general application. We may now give somewhat fuller scope to our observations, whilst we call you to NOTICE,

1. The double aspect in which our Lord's sufferings should be viewed—

[We ought to view them as *an atonement to God*, and as *an exemplar to man*. As an atonement to God, we delight to contemplate them; seeing that they are “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.” Behold him, brethren, bearing his cross to Calvary, and there exhibited, a naked bloody spectacle, to angels and to men: behold him, I say, and bear in mind that he is a victim dying under the load of your sins, and effecting reconciliation for you with your offended God — — —

At the same time we must not forget, that, as an exemplar, he shews to us what is the desert of sin, and what must infallibly overtake the impenitent and unbelieving sinner. Hear him, under the depths of dereliction, crying, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” and see him dying under the wrath of God, who for our sakes “was pleased to bruise him:” and know that such hidings of God's face, and such endurance of his wrath, must be the everlasting portion of all who die in their sins. Yes, these things, which in the green tree were done for a season, shall be done in the dry, to all eternity — — —

Never shall we have a just view of the Saviour's sufferings, unless these widely-different considerations be combined.]

2. The double operation which they should have upon our minds—

[*Hope* and *fear* should both be called forth into united and harmonious exercise. Need I say, that hope should be generated in our souls? There is no other ground of hope for any child of man; nor any reason for despondency to the vilest sinner upon earth. What cannot those sufferings expiate? and for what can they not prevail to obtain pardon? Not even the sin against the Holy Ghost is excepted on account of its enormity, but because, in its very essence, it contains a contempt of this all-sufficient remedy. I hesitate not to say, that that very blood which was then shed on Calvary will cleanse from *all* sin, even from the sin of shedding it. Lift up your eyes to Him, then, upon the cross, my brethren; and you shall, though your views be very indistinct, experience, like the wounded Israelites at the extremity of the camp, a healing efficacy to your souls — — —

Yet I would have you fear: for if God spared not his own Son, when sin lay upon him only by imputation, be assured he will not spare those who hold fast their iniquities in impenitence and unbelief. If God was a consuming fire to the green tree, be assured that he will be so likewise to the dry.

To all, then, I say, "Fear and tremble before the God of heaven; and lose not one hour in seeking reconciliation with him through the Son of his love" — — —]

MDLXXXVI.

CHRIST INTERCEDING FOR HIS ENEMIES.

Luke xxiii. 34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

AS one of the most essential qualifications for a due discharge of the priesthood was, a disposition to "commiserate those who were *ignorant* and out of the way^a," so it was the express office of the priest to "offer sacrifices for *the errors* of the people^b." Our blessed Lord, who was our great High-Priest, shewed himself on all occasions, but more especially in the instance before us, abundantly qualified for the office he had undertaken; and, in the very hour that he offered himself a sacrifice for sin, he particularly pleaded the cause of those who *ignorantly* "crucified him as a malefactor^c."

In discoursing on his words we shall shew,

I. In what respects ignorance extenuates the guilt of rejecting Christ—

There doubtless have been instances wherein men have known the Gospel, and yet refused subjection to it—

[The sin against the Holy Ghost seems evidently to include in it a wilful, deliberate, and contemptuous rejection of Christ in opposition to the clearest convictions of our own minds; and there is every reason to believe that this sin has often been committed: many also have "sinned *wilfully* after they had received the knowledge of the truth^d," and have so "fallen away, as never afterwards to be renewed unto repentance^e:" from whence it is evident that *all* contempt of the Gospel does not proceed from ignorance.]

Yet, generally speaking, a rejection of Christ arises from an ignorance of his true character—

^a Heb. v. 1, 2.

^b Heb. ix. 7.

^c See ver. 33.

^d Heb. x. 26.

^e Heb. vi. 4—6.

[This was certainly the case with respect to those who crucified our Lord: the prejudices of their education, together with the mean appearance of our Lord, blinded their eyes, so that they knew not how to acknowledge him as their Messiah. This our Lord himself confessed^f; St. Peter also declared the same^g; and St. Paul expressly says that, "if they had known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory^h."

And is it not the same with respect to *us*? Would *the profane* person scoff at the followers of the blessed Jesus, or neglect to seek an interest in him, if he knew what a gracious, merciful, loving, and adorable Being he despisedⁱ? Or would *the self-righteous moralist* feel such reluctance to submit to the Gospel, if he had any just conceptions of the suitableness and excellency of that salvation which it offered to him? Surely, however this might happen on some occasions, we cannot conceive that it should be a general, or even a common, practice.]

This view of men's conduct certainly extenuates their guilt in rejecting Christ—

[We must not imagine that ignorance is a sufficient *excuse* for sin: for the very petition in the text intimates that, notwithstanding the murderers of Christ knew not what they did, they contracted guilt, and needed forgiveness: and in other passages of Scripture it is said, that men perish for lack of knowledge^k; that "Christ will take vengeance on them" for their ignorance^l; and that "he who formed them will shew them no favour^m."

But though ignorance cannot remove, it certainly *extenuates*, our guilt. The more opportunities of information any persons had, the more guilt they contracted in rejecting the truth; on which account our Lord's hearers were altogether inexcusableⁿ, and were involved in deeper guilt than even Sodom and Gomorrah^o. On the other hand, the less light any one had in his mind, the less was the malignity of his offence. St. Paul tells us that this was, in a measure, *the ground* of his obtaining mercy^p; for that, if he had persecuted Christ as he did, and at the same time been aware of what he was doing, he would have been almost beyond the reach of mercy. And we are informed that in the final judgment the sentence denounced against the impenitent and unbelieving, will be proportioned to the light and knowledge against which they had sinned; "the servant that knew not his Lord's will, will be beaten with few stripes, while he who knowingly disobeyed it will be beaten with many stripes^q."

^f The text.

^g John xvi. 3.

^m Isai. xxvii. 11.

^p 1 Tim. i. 13.

^h Acts iii. 17.

^k Hos. iv. 6.

ⁿ John xv. 22.

^q Luke xii. 47, 48.

^h 1 Cor. ii. 8.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 8.

^o Matt. x. 15.

The reason of this is evident; for an ignorant rejection of Christ will consist with a desire to please God²: whereas that rejection of him that militates against the clear convictions of our own mind argues a rooted love of sin, and an inveterate hatred to God and his Christ¹. While therefore the latter is "a sin unto death³," and a sure forerunner of perdition⁴, the former may be repented of and forgiven.]

But, however true this statement may be, we cannot but admire,

II. The wonderful love of Christ in urging this plea on behalf of his murderers—

In contemplating this part of our subject, let us consider,

1. What his conduct was towards his murderers—

[Justly might he have aggravated the guilt of his murderers, and said, 'These are they among whom I have wrought all my miracles; and multitudes of them have experienced my power to heal: yet this is the way in which they requite all my kindness: I desire therefore, O my Father, that thou wouldest vindicate my cause, and execute upon them some signal vengeance as thou hast on others, whose guilt was infinitely less than theirs. Let the earth open to swallow them up, or lightning descend from heaven to consume them, or fire and brimstone be rained down upon them, or an angel slay hundreds of thousands of them in an instant.' He might at least have said, as the martyr Zechariah did in similar circumstances, "The Lord look upon it and requite it²." But instead of this, he prayed that they might be forgiven: he sought out the only extenuating circumstance that could be thought of, and urged it as a plea on their behalf. This was a conduct truly astonishing, and worthy of an incarnate God.]

2. The wonderful love displayed in it—

[Suppose he had at such a time been praying for his friends, it would have argued most unbounded love; but to be praying for his enemies! to plead the cause of those who by their clamours had compelled his judge to deliver him up into their hands, and to be imploring the richest mercies for those who were loading him with all manner of insults and indignities! What love was this! that in the midst of his agonies he should lose all sense of the injuries he was receiving, and, without a murmuring or vindictive word, should occupy himself wholly about the welfare of his enemies, dreading nothing

² Acts xxvi. 9. John xvi. 2.

¹ John xv. 23.

³ 1 John v. 16.

⁴ John iii. 19. Heb. x. 39

² 2 Chron. xxiv. 22.

so much as their ruin, and desiring nothing so much as to have them partakers of his glory! Well might the Apostle call this, a "love that passeth knowledge."]

To IMPROVE this subject, let us reflect,

1. How earnest we should be in seeking knowledge—

[Some might be ready to conclude that, if ignorance is an extenuation of guilt, it were safer and better to continue ignorant. But let us not mistake; it is not wilful ignorance that is to be considered in this view, but that ignorance which is unavoidable, or, at least, unintentional. Besides, ignorance is sure to keep us from Christ, and consequently to bring us into condemnation: and it will be a poor consolation to a damned soul that its guilt was not of the most aggravated kind. There is no way of escaping condemnation but by believing in Christ; and we cannot believe in him unless we know him: therefore we must seek divine instruction as the only means of everlasting salvation. This is the declaration of God himself*: the Lord grant that we may ponder it in our minds, and be regulated by it in our lives!]

2. What encouragement we have to pray for mercy—

[Never were more atrocious sinners on the face on the earth than those for whom Christ prayed: nor was any prayer ever more signally answered than that he offered for them: for no less than three thousand of those very people were forgiven in an instant, and adopted into the family of God. It was in answer to that prayer that the very blood which they had profanely desired "to be upon themselves and upon their children*" in a way of judgment, came upon them in a way of mercy, and cleansed them from the guilt of shedding it. Who then amongst us need despair of mercy? If Christ interceded so for persons in the very act of crucifying the Lord of glory, will he not intercede for mourning penitents? If he obtained mercy for those who rejected him, will he not much more for those who "desire to be found in him?" Let us not despond, but carry all our iniquities to him, that they may be cleansed by his atoning blood, and be forgiven through his prevailing intercession.]

3. What obligation lies upon us to forgive one another—

[The generality, when injured, are ready to search out every possible aggravation, in order to lower their adversary

* Eph. iii. 19.

* John xvii. 3.

* Matt. xxvii. 25.

in the estimation of others, and to justify their own resentment against him. But how differently did Jesus act! Yet "he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps^b." Let us then cultivate a forgiving spirit, yea, even towards those whose malice is most inveterate, and whose conduct towards us is most injurious. It was thus that Paul^c and Stephen^d trod in their Master's steps: and thus must we, if we would find mercy at his hands in the day of judgment^e. The express command of Jesus to every one of us is, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you^f." And indeed, if we do not exercise this disposition, we cannot repeat the Lord's Prayer without praying for our own damnation^g. "Let us therefore be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us^h."]

^b 1 Pet. ii. 21.^c 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.^d Acts vii. 60.^e Matt. xviii. 35.^f Matt. v. 44.^g Matt. vi. 12, 14, 15.^h Eph. iv. 32.

MDLXXXVII.

OUR LORD'S ANSWER TO THE PENITENT THIEF.

Luke xxiii. 42, 43. *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

THE history of Christ in every view is replete with wonders: in every part of it we trace a mixture of dignity and debasement. When he lay in a manger, the Wise Men were conducted to him by a star: when he was tempted by the devil, an angel ministered unto him: he was now dying as a malefactor, and "crucified through weakness," yet did he, in answer to the Thief's petition, assert his power to save.

I. The Thief's petition first requires our attention—

This petition, if duly considered, will appear very remarkable—

It implied *an acknowledgment of our Lord's dignity—*

[Our Lord had often asserted himself to be a king^a. For this he was accused^b, mocked^c, condemned^d, crucified^e: yet *then* did the malefactor acknowledge him as a king. He beheld him on the cross as though he had seen him upon his throne: he proclaimed him Sovereign of the *invisible* world. His petition in this view was stronger than any assertion could be.]

It implied further *an affiance in his mercy*—

[Often had our Lord been entreated to heal disorders of the body^f; but rarely had any made application to him on behalf of their souls. The Thief, however, offered his petition only for spiritual blessings^g: and for the obtaining of mercy he relied simply on the grace of Christ. Nor did he express a doubt of Christ's power or willingness to save^h. Yet was his affiance tempered with the deepest humilityⁱ.]

What acceptance he met with will appear from considering,

II. Our Lord's answer—

Our Lord had never refused those who came to him for bodily cures: he now testified the same readiness to relieve spiritual wants—

In his answer he displayed *the freeness* of his grace—

[He granted the Thief's petition *without* a moment's *hesitation*^k. He conferred the desired blessing *without upbraiding*^l. He bestowed his mercy *without* prescribing any

^a John xviii. 37. in reference to which St. Paul speaks, 1 Tim. vi. 13.

^b Luke xxiii. 2. ^c Matt. xxvii. 28, 29. ^d John xix. 12, 14, 15.

^e Mark xv. 26. ^f Mark iii. 10. and ii. 4.

^g He did not ask to have his life prolonged, or his pains mitigated, but that his soul might be saved.

^h He did not say, "If thou wilt," or "If thou canst," as others had done on less important occasions. Matt. viii. 2. Mark ix. 22.

ⁱ He did not presume to offer such a request as the ambitious disciples had done, Mark x. 37. but like the Canaanitess, Matt. xv. 27. was contented with the smallest expression of his mercy, "*Remember me.*"

^k When the innocent Joseph entreated Pharaoh's butler to remember him after his restoration to his place at court, the ungrateful butler forgot him two long years; nor would have thought of him then, but from absolute necessity. What different treatment did this guilty Thief receive from his offended Lord!

^l How justly might our Lord have upbraided him for his whole course of life, his late repentance, and especially his behaviour even upon the cross! Matt. xxvii. 44. But he was God, and acted like God. Jam. i. 5. and Luke xv. 20, 23.

conditions^m. Thus did he exemplify what he had commanded his prophet to proclaimⁿ.]

He also manifested *the fulness* of his grace—

[Often has God bestowed more than his people have desired^o. Here our Lord infinitely exceeds the Thief's request. He promises, not a remembrance merely, but converse "with himself." This converse too shall be enjoyed, not on earth, but "in Paradise^p." It shall moreover be enjoyed by him "that very day^q. Of all this he assures the Thief in the most solemn manner. What must now have been the feelings of the pardoned criminal^r! What a comment does this afford us on God's gracious declaration^s—!]

To guard this subject against abuse, we must suggest

a. CAUTION—

[Some may take occasion from it to defer their repentance: but it does not afford any just ground for such conduct. The case was singular *as it respects both Christ^t, and the Thief^u*. It is extreme folly, therefore, to reject the present overtures of mercy in expectation of such a miraculous conversion at the last.]

^m He did not require the Thief to do any thing in order to *merit* his mercy.

ⁿ Isai. lv. 1. ^o 1 Kings iii. 11—13. or Matt. xviii. 26, 27.

^p This is sometimes called Hades or Hell, as in Acts ii. 27. and in the Creed; but it means the place where departed saints dwell in the presence of God, 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4. and Rev. ii. 7.

^q Neither our Lord nor his apostles ever countenanced the idea of the soul sleeping till the resurrection. See 2 Cor. v. 8.

^r Had the executioners now offered to release him, surely he would have said like St. Paul, Phil. i. 23.

^s Isai. lv. 8, 9.

^t Christ was now in the lowest state of humiliation; Divine wisdom judged it necessary therefore to give to the world some signal display of his dignity and glory. Hence the whole creation was constrained to bear testimony to him; Matt. xxvii. 45, 51. and the Thief was chosen from among men to be a monument of his power and grace. But such an occasion never will occur again; and therefore no similar interposition is to be expected.

^u The Thief, like other malefactor^s, had most probably disregarded the means of grace, and never heard of Christ before. Yet now he confessed his sin, rebuked his companion, vindicated Christ, and committed himself entirely to his mercy. But how different was this exercise of grace from what we generally see on a death-bed! And what little reason have we to expect that such grace shall be given us in our last hours, when we are despising the offers of Grace and Mercy which are made to us continually!

Nevertheless we may derive from this history much
ENCOURAGEMENT—

[It forbids any, however long or heinously they may have sinned, to despair. It points out the simple way in which we may attain salvation. The substance of our Lord's answer is applicable to every penitent. Such joy is offered to all^x: let all seek it in the same way^y.]

^x Rom. x. 12, 13.

^y Ps. cvi. 4.

MDLXXXVIII.

THE EFFECT OF CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE BEHOLDERS.

Luke xxiii. 47, 48. *Now when the Centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

RAPID are the revolutions of the human mind: like the sea, it is easily agitated by every gust of wind, and driven with violence in whatever direction it may happen to be impelled. God has given us reason to guide us and to keep us fixed to our purpose; but we are slaves to passion, and yield ourselves willing instruments of all who have skill and inclination to move us. We have a striking instance of this fluctuating disposition in the Jewish populace: they had been so impressed with the wonders which Jesus had wrought in confirmation of his divine mission, that they all followed him with acclamations and hosannahs into Jerusalem: but by the artifices of the chief priests and rulers, they were, in the space of three days, made as clamorous against him, all of them demanding, as with one voice, that he should be crucified. Scarcely however had they prevailed, but another change took place in their minds; and they were as sorry at seeing what they had accomplished, as they had just before been eager to accomplish it.

Let us consider,

I. The effects which Christ's death produced on the beholders—

The execution of criminals is of itself calculated to impress the mind with pity for the sufferers, and to evince the evil of those crimes for which they suffer: but the crucifixion of our Lord drew the attention of the spectators to their own state, and led them to contemplate their own guilt and danger in being accessory to it. Observe the effect it produced,

1. On the multitude—

[The chief priests and rulers, it should seem, were not at all affected with it. Their envy, their pride, their resentment had taken too deep a root within them to suffer them to listen for a moment to the voice of conscience: but the multitude, who were mere instruments of their rage, began to consider what they had done. The three hours of darkness had given them time for reflection: the recollection of all that Christ had done for their nation, led them to consider what return they had now made him for all his unparalleled kindness; and the earthquake convinced them that they were in the hands of an angry God. Now therefore they began to express their regret and sorrow at having lent their aid to so cruel a deed, so wicked a conspiracy. Now they shewed that sin has a far different aspect when committed, from what it had previous to the commission of it. Even Judas, when he saw what was likely to be the consequence of his treachery, was filled with compunction, and would have gladly reversed the deed to which his covetousness had impelled him. So these now wished that they had not yielded to the instigations of their rulers, or suffered themselves to participate in so foul a crime — — — How far their repentance was genuine, we are not able to say: though we think it probable that numbers of them were amongst the converts on the day of Pentecost: but of this we are sure, that sin, of whatever kind, when once it is viewed aright, will cause us to “smite our breasts” with anguish, and to forsake the company of those who hold fast their transgressions: and that, if this effect be not produced upon us now, we shall “weep and wail and gnash our teeth” with unavailing sorrows to all eternity.]

2. On the Centurion—

[He, and those whom he commanded, had attended there, not so much from choice as from necessity: accordingly we find both in him and them a mind more open to conviction: for they, though heathens, became the advocates of HIM, whom his own nation had rejected and abhorred. The miraculous signs attendant on the death of Christ, together with the whole conduct of that righteous Sufferer, and the peculiar

manner in which he resigned his life, evincing indisputably that it was not taken away from him, but that he surrendered it voluntarily into his Father's hands; all this together convinced the Centurion, that Jesus was the very person whom he had professed himself to be. Hence, in the hearing of all around him, he exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man," "Truly this was the Son of God.*" There were two grounds on which Jesus had been put to death; the one was, that he was *a blasphemer*, for making himself the Son of God; the other was, that he was *a rebel* against Cæsar, for making himself a king. In opposition to both of these accusations the Centurion affirms, that he was no rebel, but "a righteous man;" and that he was no blasphemer, but "the very Son of God." Thus, whilst the Jews were pouring contempt on God, the Centurion "glorified him;" and, whilst they hardened their hearts against him, he and his fellow-soldiers "feared greatly." What a blessed earnest was this of the conversion of the Gentiles! and what a reproof is this to *us*, who can hear of these transactions without any emotion, and neglect that Saviour whom he acknowledged! — — —]

From the effects of Christ's death on the beholders, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections it suggests to us—

Amongst the numberless considerations which naturally arise from this subject, we will select such only as have not been anticipated under any other view of our Lord's sufferings, and only two or three of them.

OBSERVE then from hence,

1. That the best of causes may be violently opposed—

[If we were speaking to Jews, we should have need to prove the excellence of Christianity; but to a Christian assembly, it is scarcely necessary to prove that the cause of Christ is the best of all causes. We see in the Gospel the most stupendous display of God's wisdom and love; a plan for the saving of a ruined world, and for restoring men to the Divine favour, through the mediation and intercession of God's only-begotten Son. We see, or at least profess to see, how suited it is to our necessities, and how sufficient for our wants: and, if we are Christians indeed, we know by sweet experience that it is an inexhaustible source of peace and joy, of righteousness

* Compare Matt. xxvii. 54.

and true holiness. Yet with what vehemence was it opposed at its first establishment! Not all the wisdom and innocence of Jesus, nor all the benevolent miracles that he wrought, could disarm his enemies: though "it was without a cause that they hated him," they hated him unto death. In like manner they persecuted unto death his chosen messengers, and myriads of his faithful people: yet, in the review of all which was done to stop the progress of his religion, we Christians do not hesitate to affirm that his cause was good; and whilst we execrate the memory of his opposers, we canonize his followers as saints and martyrs.

But what is the treatment which his cause meets with at this hour? Is there not the same hostility against it, though the exercise of that hostility is moderated by the laws under which we live? People indeed will pretend that the cause which they oppose, is not the cause of Christ; just as the Jews denied that they were opposing the cause of God, and even pretended to be actuated by zeal for God: but as *they* opposed the Holy Scriptures, so do modern persecutors; and in so doing they both fulfil the Scriptures, and unwittingly confirm the very truths they oppose. Whatever misrepresentations therefore men may adduce to vilify the truths and people of God, the religion of Christ is the same as it ever was; nor does the contempt poured upon it diminish in the least degree the respect in which it should be held. We must not think the worse of the Gospel because it is despised, but must weigh it in the balance of the sanctuary, and estimate it by its own intrinsic worth.]

2. That the cause of Christ will ultimately triumph—

[The chief priests and rulers congratulated themselves on their success, when they saw the despised Nazarene entombed. But behold, the breath had scarcely departed from his body before his triumphs began; so true is that saying of the Apostle, "He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them on his cross^b." The whole multitude who attended his crucifixion, smote their breasts with penitential sorrow; and the Centurion who presided at his execution, confessed him in the presence of his murderers! Thus early were the first-fruits of the Gospel reaped: and speedily afterwards followed an abundant harvest. The resurrection and ascension of Christ proved to his enemies how vain were all their efforts against him: and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost gathered thousands to his standard in one day. From that time his religion spread throughout Judæa and the whole Roman empire; and we, at

^b Col. ii. 15.

this distant place and period, are witnesses for him that his cause has triumphed, and that it shall finally prevail throughout all the earth. God had set the world at defiance; and had pronounced obedience to the Gospel to be the true wisdom of every man, of kings and governors, as well as of the lowest classes of society: and, agreeably to his predictions, "the stone which the builders disallowed, is become the head of the corner." Let men then continue to oppose the Gospel as they will, it shall "run and be glorified, and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit:" it is a rock that defies all the power or policy of hell itself: and, as "all who fall upon it shall be broken, so, on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Happy would it be if the enemies of Christ would avail themselves of the space allowed them for reflection, and would consider what an unequal contest they are endeavouring to maintain! They think that they are fighting against a few weak enthusiasts: but they are "fighting against God" himself, who, in the person of his Son, addresses them, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" The Lord grant that the admonition given on that occasion to that bitter persecutor, may be remembered by us all; "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks!"]

3. That the proper effect of his death is to produce penitence and faith in all—

[We see the propriety of their conduct who smote their breasts, and publicly professed their faith in Christ: we even congratulate them in our minds on their speedy experience of such a blessed change. But was this conduct proper in them only? Is there no occasion for similar emotions amongst us? Perhaps, instead of opposing, we approve and profess the Gospel: but who amongst us has not opposed the establishment of Christ's kingdom in his own heart? Though we did not unite with those who crucified him on Mount Calvary, have we not "crucified him afresh," by continuing in sin? Truly there is even more cause for us to "smite our breasts," than there was for that multitude to do so: for they sinned "through ignorance;" "they knew not what they did:" but we sin against light and knowledge, yea, against our own most solemn vows of allegiance to him. The smallest knowledge of our own hearts will furnish us with a catalogue of sins that we have committed against him, a catalogue that would reach up to heaven. This then I say; let us imitate the penitent multitude and the believing Centurion: and in this especially let us imitate them, in not moving from the place where we are,

• Ps. ii. 1—6, 9—12. with Acts iv. 25, 26.

without first abasing ourselves before God for the guilt we have contracted, and looking unto Jesus for the expiation of it. Doubtless the change that took place in them, was wrought by the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose office is "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and shew them unto us." That Spirit is promised "to us, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Let us then pray for the influences of that same Spirit upon our hearts; that, through his powerful operations, we may "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born^d."]

^d Zech. xii. 10.

MDLXXXIX.

THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS AND EXALTATION.

Luke xxiv. 26. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*

AN ignorance of the Scriptures is far more injurious to us than we are apt to imagine; for it lies at the root of all our errors both in faith and practice. The infidels of old denied the doctrine of the resurrection, "not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God." The Jewish rulers crucified their Messiah, because they were ignorant of the character in which, according to the Scriptures, he was to appear; and thus they unwittingly fulfilled the very Scriptures which they professed to reverence. The Disciples of our Lord himself were confounded at the death of their Master, and averse to credit the reports of his resurrection, because "they knew not the Scriptures that he must rise again." Our blessed Lord, after his resurrection, joined two of them in their way to Emmaus; and when he found how ignorant and incredulous they were, he reprov'd them; and, to convince them that "the Messiah *ought* to have suffered the very things which he had suffered, and in that way to enter into his glory," he expounded to them the principal prophecies relating to those events.

His appeal to them on that occasion leads us to consider,

I. The necessity of Christ's sufferings unto death—

There was no necessity for Christ to undertake the redemption of man; but, supposing him to have undertaken it, then there was a necessity for his sufferings unto death;

1. To fulfil the Scriptures—

[The death of Christ had been exhibited in *types* from the very beginning: all the sacrifices offered by Adam, Abel, Noah, and the Jews themselves, marked out a suffering Messiah. The same also was declared in many express *prophecies*. Not to mention the intimation of it given in the first prophecy^a, nothing could be more plain than the declarations of Isaiah on this subject^b: it seems perfectly astonishing to us, that people professing to regard his writings as prophecies of the Messiah, should ever make the crucifixion of Christ a stumbling-block, or account the doctrine of his cross foolishness. How decisive too is the testimony of Daniel^c; as is that also of Zechariah^d! But besides these general testimonies, there are particular intimations respecting all the most minute circumstances of his death; the collective view of which forms a body of evidence that is altogether irresistible.

But how could these be fulfilled if Jesus should not suffer? they must all be rendered null and void, and the veracity of the inspired writers, yea, of Him also who inspired them, must be for ever impeached.]

2. To answer the ends of his mission—

[For what did Jesus come into the world? Was it not to bear the sins of men in his own body, and, by rendering satisfaction to God, to make the exercise of mercy compatible with the rights of truth and justice? But how were these ends to be attained? The obedience of Jesus, however perfect, could not answer these ends. The law denounced death against the transgressor: and death must be inflicted on him, or on his surety. If therefore Jesus was to be a surety for man, he must undergo death; he must bear that which man should have borne: nothing but this could satisfy the demands of the law: and if man were saved without the death of his Surety, the whole authority of the law must be cancelled, and the Law-giver himself be dishonoured in the sight of all his creatures. We grant, for argument's sake, that the mercy of God would be magnified in such a way of pardoning transgression: but then what regard would he shew for the rights

^a Gen. iii. 15.

^c Dan. ix. 26.

^b Isai. lii. 14. and liii. 3—5.

^d Zech. xiii. 7.

of justice? What would become of his truth and faithfulness? How could "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other?" The perfections of God would be set at variance, and some would triumph at the expense of others: but this would be directly contrary to the ends of Christ's mission: and therefore our Divine Surety must suffer death, in order to answer the ends for which he became incarnate.]

With the death of Christ is connected—

II. The necessity of his exaltation to glory—

The two cannot be separated: there was a necessity that the latter should take place,

1. To complete his work—

[The work of the high-priest was not finished, when he had shed the blood of his sacrifice: he must carry that blood within the vail, and sprinkle it upon, and before, the mercy-seat: and he must then burn incense before the mercy-seat: nor, till this was accomplished, could he come out to bless the people. Thus must our great High-Priest not only offer himself a Sacrifice, but "enter into heaven with his own blood;" and, together with that, present also the incense of his own intercession. If he should not do this, he would leave his work unfinished, and consequently of no avail. But how should he do this, if he should not "enter into his glory?" Nor is it his priestly office only that would be made void; his prophetic and kingly offices also would be incomplete: he teaches men by his Spirit; but "the Holy Ghost would not have been given, if Jesus had not been glorified:" it was necessary that he should go into heaven, that he might send the Spirit down from thence. Nor could he exercise his kingly government unless he were enthroned on high, and invested with power to subdue all things unto himself. Hence, then, his exaltation was as necessary to the completion of his work, as his humiliation was to its commencement.]

2. To give to his people a solid ground of hope—

[If our surety, who had been carried to prison for our debt, were kept immured in it, we should have reason to fear that he was unable to fulfil his engagements: but if we saw him liberated, we should conclude that he had fully discharged our debt. Thus if our blessed Lord had never been exalted to heaven to enjoy "*his* glory," which he possessed previous

* Heb. ix. 12, 24.

† John vii. 39.

‡ John xvi. 7.

§ Phil. ii. 9—11. "God exalted Him, *that* every knee should bow," &c.

to his incarnation, we should feel many misgiving thoughts respecting the acceptance of his sacrifice, and the efficacy of his mediation. But when he is restored to that glory which for our sakes he had laid aside, we cannot entertain a doubt respecting his sufficiency for our full and complete salvation. Though by dying on the cross he appeared unable to save himself, yet, by his ascending to heaven afterwards, we are assured of his power to save us: because he raised up himself, we know he can raise up us; and, "because he liveth, we trust assuredly that we shall live also." Nor are we left to conclude this from uncertain reasonings; for St. Peter expressly tells us, that "God raised him up, and *gave him glory* that our faith and hope might be in God."]

To obtain a just view of our Lord's address, it will be proper to notice,

III. The peculiar force of his appeal—

There is a very striking energy in the text, as connected with the preceding and following verses: it intimated,

1. That they ought to have been better acquainted with the Scriptures—

[The Jews had the sacred oracles read and expounded to them every Sabbath-day; and therefore they were inexcusable in not being well acquainted with their contents, especially with those great truths which related to their Messiah. And the Apostles, above all, were blame-worthy, because they had enjoyed the ministry of our Lord himself. How blameable then are we, if we are ignorant of that which relates to Christ; we, who have all the light of the New Testament as well as of the Old; we, who can compare the prophecies with the history of their accomplishment; we, to whom the Bible is accessible at all times; and who have its contents statedly and plainly opened to us! We are apt to think our ignorance of the Scriptures excusable, because we are not scholars, or because we must attend to our worldly callings: but the Disciples were poor fishermen, and therefore as excusable as any persons upon those grounds; yet our Lord justly and severely reproved their ignorance: and most assuredly he will reprove us also in the day of judgment, for not using better the means of instruction which he has afforded us, unless we search the Scriptures, and labour diligently to acquaint ourselves with the things belonging to our peace.]

2. That the Scriptures, whether men be acquainted with them or not, shall surely be fulfilled—

[The Scriptures had foretold the sufferings, and the consequent glory, of the Messiah; and therefore it ought not to have been a matter of surprise that the events had corresponded with the predictions. Thus every thing relating to men's acceptance or rejection of the Messiah, is foretold; and, whatever they may think to the contrary, every jot and tittle of it shall be accomplished. The eternal sufferings of the impenitent and unbelieving, may appear as improbable as the sufferings of the Messiah: and the eternal happiness of the contrite and believing, may seem as unlikely as the exaltation of Jesus, who was crucified. But, in matters that are revealed, we must not reckon upon probabilities or improbabilities: whatever is foretold, is as certain as the power and veracity of God can make it. They who look to our once crucified, but now exalted, Saviour, and make him the sole ground of their hope and confidence, are as sure of being in heaven as if they were already there, provided they continue to exercise faith on him, and shew forth their faith by their works. They, on the contrary, who neglect the Saviour, or make any thing of their own the ground of their confidence, are as sure of everlasting misery as if they were already enduring it in hell, unless they repent, and embrace the Saviour with their whole hearts. That which "*ought*" to be, according to the Scriptures, *shall* be: neither the fears of the timid, nor the presumption of the bold, shall at all change the decrees of heaven: yea rather, the agents, whether men or devils, who most labour to counteract the will of God, shall be taken in their own craftiness, and be the active, though unsuspecting, instruments of accomplishing his designs.]

INFER—

1. How awful must have been the state of man that such things should be necessary for his recovery!

[Inexpressibly dreadful must have been that guilt which required the sufferings of God's only dear Son to expiate it; and most deplorable that helplessness which could not be remedied but by his consequent exaltation to glory. We may judge of the state of man by that to which the fallen angels are reduced. There would have been no difference between them and us to all eternity, if Jesus had not undertaken for us. And such indeed is the state of those who are not interested in the Saviour: for, as far as respects their happiness, it is the same thing not to have a Saviour, and not to be interested in the Saviour that there is; only indeed their guilt is awfully increased by their contempt of him. Think then of this, ye who neglect the Saviour: as far as respects any hope of mercy, ye are in the condition of the fallen angels, while ye continue

to neglect him: but, as to your final doom, you must perish under the aggravated guilt of rejecting and condemning your incarnate God. O that you may consider this, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before you!"]

2. How blessed is the state of those who are interested in the Saviour!

[Guilty and helpless as you are in yourselves, you have no need to despond when you reflect on what has been done for your salvation. Supposing that you would be restored to the favour of God, what can you think of that "*ought*" to be done, either for God's honour or for your security, which has not already been done for you? Would you have a Surety? There is one. Would you have him to be God? He is so. Would you have him suffer all that you ought to suffer? He has done so. Would you have him invested with glory that he may perfect in you the work which he has begun? He is so. Inquire of God himself what *ought* to be done: search the Scriptures from one end to the other: see what the prophets spake: see what our Lord himself spake: and then try if you can find one thing omitted which has not been already accomplished, or is not accomplishing at this moment. Rejoice, then, Believer, rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice. You may be at present suffering like our Lord, and may be ready to doubt whether you shall ever behold the face of your God in peace: but "the word of the Lord is tried," and "the Promises are sure to all the Seed." Soon you shall be with your exalted Lord, and, having suffered with him awhile, shall eternally be glorified together.]

MDXC.

BLESSEDNESS OF COMMUNION WITH CHRIST.

Luke xxiv. 32. *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*

THE divine authority of the Christian religion was chiefly to be proved by the resurrection of Christ. Hence our Lord gave his Disciples the most unquestionable evidence of his resurrection during the space of forty days previous to his ascension to heaven. After several other manifestations of himself to different Disciples on the day of his resurrection, he entered into conversation with two of them on their

way to Emmaus: under the appearance of a stranger, he then expounded to them all the most important parts of the Mosaic and prophetic writings, and shewed them, that there was no just reason for them to be so disconcerted by his death, or so incredulous about his resurrection, since their own Scriptures had so clearly declared that the Messiah should die and rise again. Arriving at Emmaus, he accepted their invitation to abide with them at the house whither they were going: and at supper, he took the bread, and implored the Divine blessing upon it, and brake it, and gave it to them, just as he had been wont to do in former times. *Now* their eyes were opened; and in this unexpected guest they recognized their Lord and Master. It pleased him however, for wise and gracious reasons, to withdraw himself suddenly from them, and to leave them to make their own reflections upon all that had passed. Accordingly, no sooner had they recovered their surprise, than they addressed one another in the words of our text, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

This kind of appearance, and this mode of communicating instruction, were peculiar to the occasion, and must be looked for no more: Christ is personally gone into heaven, where he will abide till the time of the restitution of all things. But we must not therefore imagine that all intercourse has ceased between himself and his people; for he will still, in a spiritual way, maintain communion with them, and give them such discoveries of himself, as shall cause their "hearts to burn within them."

In confirmation of this truth, we shall shew,

- I. That communion with Christ is yet the privilege of his believing people—

Whilst we disclaim all idea of visions, and impulses, and wild enthusiastic conceits, we do affirm that Christ will yet "manifest himself unto his people, as he does not unto the world:"

1. In the private duties of the closet—

[Christ has said to his Church, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” This is to be understood, not of his corporeal, but spiritual, presence; according to what St. Paul prayed for in behalf of Timothy, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit^a.” In reading the Scriptures, he will, by his Holy Spirit, cast a light upon the Scriptures, as he did in this exposition which he gave to the Disciples; fixing our attention upon those points which are of primary importance, and “opening our understandings to understand them^b.” He will give us that spiritual discernment which is necessary for a right perception of their import^c, and will so impress them on our hearts as to make them effectual for all the purposes of his grace^d. Sometimes he will cause his word to distil as the dew, or to descend as the rain and snow, which fall not to the earth in vain^e; and at other times he will cause it to pierce as a sword^f, or to burn like fire, or, like a hammer, to break the rocky heart in pieces^g.

In prayer also will he give “boldness and access with confidence by faith in him^h.” His Holy Spirit will “help our infirmities and teach us what to pray for as we ought,” and “make intercession in us with groans which cannot be utteredⁱ.” He “will draw nigh to us whilst we draw nigh to him^k,” he “will hear us and answer us,” and say, “Here I am^l,” he will also impart to us the things we pray for, and give us “grace sufficient” for every occasion that can arise^m. Thousands can yet attest the truth of these things: they have gone to his throne of grace weak, dejected, disconsolate; and have lost all their burthen there, and come away filled “with joy and peace in believing.”]

2. In the public ordinances of religion—

[Our Lord has particularly promised, that “where two or three are met together in his name, there he will be in the midst of themⁿ.” In the public assemblies of his people therefore he will assuredly be present. Indeed it is his presence there which alone makes them effectual for the end designed: and “if he go not up with us, it is to little purpose that we go” thither. It is he who gives energy to the word preached: “though Paul should plant, or Apollos water, it is He only that gives the increase^o.” Ministers are merely the instruments whereby God communicates his blessings to the Church.

^a 2 Tim. iv. 22.^d Acts xvi. 14.^f Heb. iv. 12.ⁱ Rom. viii. 26.^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.^b Luke xxiv. 45.^e Deut. xxxii. 2. Isai. lv. 10, 11.^g Jer. xxiii. 29.^k Jam. iv. 8.ⁿ Matt. xviii. 20.^c 2 Cor. ii. 14.^h Eph. iii. 12.^l Isai. lviii. 9.^o 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.

Good is then done, and sinners are converted to God, when the power of the Lord is present to work, and when the word comes to their hearts, "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance^p." Hence it is that persons, who but a little time before "knew not that the Lord God was in that place," are constrained to cry out, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven^q."

3. In the common offices of life—

[There is no time, nor place, where the Lord Jesus will not vouchsafe his presence to those who call upon him. In a crowd, in the midst of business, no less than in the retired and lonely walk, will our Lord be with them^r: he will even be as "their shade upon their right hand^s," to keep them from all evil, and to load them with his richest benefits: "his goodness and mercy shall follow them;" yea, "he himself will walk with them, and dwell in them," so that in every possible situation they shall be enabled to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ^t." How often has this been realized in social converse, and in the chambers of the sick! — — —]

If this be the privilege of his people, it may justly be said,

II. That it is the most exalted privilege they can possibly enjoy—

There is no satisfaction that a human being can possess, that is at all to be compared with that which arises from communion with his God and Saviour. The pleasure it affords is,

1. The most refined—

[That which is usually called pleasure, is, for the most part, unworthy of the name: the gratifications of sense are suited only to our animal nature, and enjoyed only in common with the beasts. Even intellectual pleasures, though more suited to us as rational beings, are yet far below the desires which we feel, and the capacities with which we are endowed. The Christian is "made partaker of a Divine nature;" and he can be satisfied with nothing less than the enjoyment of the Divinity himself. Accordingly this is his actual attainment. The Spirit of God inspires him with a lively hope^u," and "a peace that passeth all understanding;" and so reveals and

^p 1 Thess. i. 5.

^q Gen. xxviii. 16, 17.

^r Gen. xxviii. 15.

^s Ps. cxxi. 4—8.

^t 1 John i. 3.

^u 1 Pet. i. 3.

"glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ" in his soul^x, as to make him "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified^y." Yes, the joy that he imparts, is such as disembodied spirits may be supposed to feel, an earnest and a foretaste of heaven itself^z.]

2. The most independent—

[For all other pleasures we are dependent either on outward circumstances, or on the state of our own minds. If, for instance, we are racked with pain, or bowed down with grief, or standing on the brink of the grave, no earthly thing will afford us any comfort. Not so the pleasure of which we are speaking; that is even advanced by the want of other things, and never is enjoyed with so rich a zest, as when it has nothing to aid, but every thing to counteract it. Then it is that the excellency of communion with Christ appears in its true colours — — —]

3. The most ennobling—

[Earthly pleasures prevent, for the most part, the ascent of the soul towards heaven — — — but communion with Christ raises the soul to heaven, and transforms it by constantly progressive changes into the Divine image^a — — —]

4. The most diffusive—

[Other pleasures we are content to enjoy alone: but *this* no one ever tasted, without instantly feeling in his soul a desire to impart it to those around him. "Come unto me, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul." "Draw *me*," says the Church, "and *we* will run after thee^b;" for no one that is drawn would ever willingly come alone; he would, if possible, draw all others along with him — — —]

Some QUESTIONS, which may possibly arise in the minds of those who desire communion with Christ, we shall now endeavour to answer—

1. How are we to attain it?

[It is not to be sought for in the circles of gaiety or in the cares of business, but in reading the word of God and prayer. We are aware, that all persons cannot dedicate to these exercises an equal degree of their time: nor is it necessary that they should: but all *may*, and *must*, devote some portion of their time to this great pursuit. God has given us six days for worldly labour, and requires the seventh to be sanctified to him: and if that day were conscientiously consecrated to the Lord, we should not long be unacquainted with the subject before us: "the grace of our Lord Jesus

^x Gal. i. 16. John xvi. 14. ^y 1 Pet. i. 8. The Greek.

^z Eph. i. 13, 14.

^a 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^b Cant. i. 4.

Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost," would soon be known to us by sweet experience. "Search the Scriptures," says our Lord; "for they are they that testify of me." Again, "He spake a parable, to teach us that we should pray always, and not faint." These are the occupations in which we should take delight: and like the Apostles in their way to Emmaus, we should make the great mysteries of redemption a subject of our deepest research, and of our most familiar converse. Were we thus to seek after Christ, we should soon have the veil removed from our eyes; and God would "shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ."]

2. How are we to distinguish it?

[I grant that there are enthusiasts, who pretend to such impulses, and such communications as the Scriptures do not warrant us to expect: and it is certainly desirable to be on our guard that we be not led astray by them. But we must not despise those manifestations which God does vouchsafe to his people, because there are enthusiasts who profess to have experienced more. We do not reject good coin because a spurious coin is sometimes obtruded in its stead: but we learn to distinguish between them. So in reference to the subject before us, we should "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

We apprehend then that the genuine experience of communion with Christ may be distinguished from enthusiastic pretensions to it, both by its rise, and its operation on the mind. Enthusiasts found their pretensions on some visions, or dreams, or on the word of God coming in a peculiar manner to their minds: and they are filled with pride, and conceit, and an unhallowed presumptuous confidence, which are certain indications of spiritual delusion. The true child of God, on the contrary, is humbled in the dust by the favours vouchsafed to his soul: he prostrates himself like Abraham and Moses^c, and covers his face with his mantle, as Elijah^d, and abhors himself, like Job, in dust and ashes^e. Nor is he hasty to talk of these manifestations: he will strive indeed to bring others to similar enjoyments; but he will not be forward to boast of his own: and the confidence which they create within him renders him tenfold more watchful against every occasion of sin. By such marks as these it will not be difficult for an humble person to judge; but such is the blinding efficacy of pride and vanity, that it is little less than a miracle if an enthusiast be ever brought to try himself by them.]

^c Gen. xvii. 3. Exod. xxxiv. 8. ^d 1 Kings xix. 13.

^e Job xl. 4. and xlii. 5, 6.

3. How to improve it?

[We know of no better advice than that of St. Paul, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption." God is a jealous God. There are no bounds to his love to those who truly honour him and walk circumspectly before him; "He will rejoice over them to do them good:" but if we presume upon his favour, and give way to any sin, we may soon provoke him to withdraw from us. What God himself then said to his people respecting the Angel of the Covenant, whom he sent to bring them into the land of Canaan, I would say to you; "Beware of him, and obey his voice; provoke him not: for he will not pardon your transgressions'." Merciful as he is towards repenting sinners, he will not endure any secret abomination in the hearts of his believing people; and if he behold any, he will hide his face from them till it be put away. If then he has made you new creatures, and sealed you for his own, be careful to "glorify him in your body and in your spirit, which are his."]

† Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.

MDXCI.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

Luke xxiv. 33, 34. *And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed.*

AMONG the various proofs of the truth of Christianity, that which arises from the credibility of the witnesses is by no means the least: nor is their credibility established by any thing more than by their backwardness to believe the resurrection of Christ, upon which the whole of Christianity is founded. They had been repeatedly informed by our Lord, that he should die, and rise again on the third day; yet upon his death they were totally confounded and disconsolate. Two of them conversing together in their way to Emmaus, were overtaken by a person whom they knew not, but who was none other than Jesus himself. He inquired into the subject of their conversation: upon which they told him what expectations they had once formed concerning their

deceased Master ; they once thought that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel ; but now their hopes were at an end. They had heard indeed that he was risen that morning from the grave ; that certain women who were of their company had seen a vision of angels, who testified that he was alive ; that moreover some others had gone to the sepulchre, and found that it was even so as the women had said : but yet they could not credit these reports. After their conference, Jesus discovered himself to *them*, as he had already done to many others ; by this they were convinced ; and, notwithstanding the day was far spent, instead of staying, as they had intended, at Emmaus, they returned that same hour to Jerusalem, that they might acquaint the other Disciples with these joyful tidings, and bear their testimony to the truth of the things which had been reported. And when they came to Jerusalem, they found the Eleven gathered together, and others assembled with them, all overcome by the weight of evidence, and full of this wonderful event ; and heard them saying one to another, " The Lord is risen indeed."

From these words we shall take occasion to consider,

The importance of Christ's Resurrection ;

The proofs of it ; and

The uses we should make of it.

I. The importance of Christ's Resurrection—

St. Paul, instructing his beloved Timothy what to do and teach, particularly gives him this advice, " Remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead." It was necessary that he should remember the resurrection of Christ, on many accounts ; partly for his own comfort, because all his hopes of salvation were founded on it ; but principally, that by endeavouring to establish this point, he might convince the ignorant, and confirm the enlightened. Whatever else he might omit, it was necessary that he should insist much on this, because it was a doctrine of the utmost importance : For,

First, If Jesus was not risen, *he was an impostor*. Our Lord, in his discourses, had frequently foretold his resurrection : sometimes he reminded his hearers of the Prophet Jonas, who, as a type of him, was three days and three nights in the belly of a whale : at other times he declared it in still plainer terms ; “ Destroy this Temple (viz. his own body), and in three days I will raise it up again : ” and to his Disciples he said repeatedly, that he must be crucified, and that on the third day he would rise again. Now, though his Disciples understood none of these things, yet there was evidently, amongst his enemies, some expectation of his resurrection ; because they made sure the sepulchre, sealed the stone, and set a guard to prevent it, or at least to prevent his being stolen away ; that so, by ascertaining that he was not risen, they might prove him a deceiver. And, had he not risen, they had accomplished their utmost wishes : they had detected him in deluding his followers, and thereby discovered him to be an impostor. But by rising according to his own word, he manifested that he was no impostor ; but, as the Apostle says, he declared himself to be the Son of God, “ with power by his resurrection from the dead.”

Again : If Jesus rose not, *the Apostles were false witnesses*. It was the grand truth which they were to establish : for when another Apostle was to be chosen in the place of Judas, the traitor, they were to “ take one who had accompanied them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day wherein he was taken up from them, that he might be *ordained a witness, with them, of His resurrection.* ” Accordingly, they “ went everywhere, giving witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” When some among the Corinthian Church denied the resurrection of the dead, Paul proved it from the resurrection of Christ ; and that again he proved by the most undeniable arguments : and then he very justly added, “ If Christ be not risen, we are found false-witnesses of God.”

Again : If Christ be not risen, *the Gospel is an*

imposition. The very ground-work of all the Gospel is, the resurrection of Christ; "that he died for our offences, and was raised again for our justification;" for as his death was necessary, because he had undertaken to pay our debt, so his resurrection was also necessary, to shew that he had fully discharged it: if therefore he be not risen, all preaching of the Gospel, all credit given to it, and all hope of deliverance through him is vain; and this is what the Apostle himself has said, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Again: If Christ be not risen, *the Old Testament is also false*—It is said, "He rose again according to the Scriptures;" His resurrection was typified, perhaps in the exaltation of Joseph from the prison to the government of the Egyptian kingdom; probably also in the live bird which was dipped in the blood of one that had been sacrificed and let loose into the air: there can be little doubt but that Isaac's restoration, as it were, from the dead, was intended to prefigure it; and it is absolutely certain, that Jonas was a type of Christ in that particular: *that* type, therefore, must be fulfilled in Christ, or else it was false. It had also been *foretold* by David; "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption:" by this passage the Apostle Peter, in his first Sermon, convinces three thousand of the Jews that Jesus was to rise: and indeed it intimates the time of his continuance in the grave; for in Judea bodies began to corrupt on the fourth day; so that he must rise before that time, because he was to see no corruption. Thus the Old Testament, as well as the New, must be false, if Christ be not risen.

But further: If Christ be not risen, we, notwithstanding we be believers in Christ, are yet *laden with the guilt of all our sins*. By believing in Christ, we profess to be delivered from condemnation and to be cleansed from the guilt of all sin: but it has already appeared, that if Christ be not risen, he is a deceiver, his Apostles are false witnesses, the Gospel is an imposition, and the Old Testament itself is false: so

that we must of necessity be under the guilt of our sins as much as ever, unless we can be delivered from it by crediting what is not true. And this is what the Apostle has also said, "If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins."

I add once more: If Christ be not risen, *there neither is nor ever will be so much as one person in heaven*. All those eminent saints that we suppose to have been exalted to heaven, died in the faith of Christ; of Christ, who *should* come; or of Christ, who *did* come. They themselves disclaimed every other hope but through Christ; and if they were deceived by him, woe be to them; for the Apostle testifies, "If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins; then *they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished*;" so that not one of them is saved, if Christ be not risen.

We see then of what importance the doctrine of the Resurrection is! for if it be not true, Christ is an impostor. The Apostles are false-witnesses. The Gospel is an imposition, (and consequently the Apostle's preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain); moreover, ye are yet in your sins, and all the saints that have ever lived have perished. Surely a doctrine of such importance ought to be well considered, and unquestionably proved. I proceed therefore,

II. To the proofs of this doctrine—

Time will not allow us to enter into a large discussion of this point; nor indeed is it as necessary for *us* to do so, as it was for the Apostles; for the minds of men in these days are open to conviction, whereas *they* had to combat with all the prejudices of those who put him to death. A few proofs therefore may suffice. We will prove it then,

First; From the testimony of *angels*. At the sepulchre of our Lord there appeared, both to the women and to others, a vision of angels, who told them that he was risen, saying, "He is not here but is risen; come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Next; From the testimony of *friends*. He appeared to many, and ate and drank with them at different times after he rose from the dead. He suffered them to handle his body, to put their fingers into the print of the nails, and to thrust their hand into his side. And the very incredulity of all his Disciples, and especially of Thomas, convinces us, that they would not have believed it without the fullest evidence. He moreover appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, and in the presence of them all was taken up into heaven.

Next; From the testimony of *enemies*. Where did the Apostles begin to preach Christ? At Jerusalem, the very place where he had been crucified; and that too within a few days after his death: and so clearly did they prove, that he who had been crucified was risen from the dead, that in the first sermon three thousand of his enemies were converted and became his followers. Paul declared, that the greater part of the five hundred who had seen his ascension, were then alive: now, if it had not been true, it must have been strange that so many should enter into such a conspiracy, from which they could derive no advantage, and which would most probably expose them to persecutions and death: and it must be a miracle indeed if neither fear nor interest had induced some one or other of them to discover the cheat, particularly since there was one traitor even among the Twelve Apostles. But the very falsehood which the enemies framed on this occasion, was a testimony in favour of what they endeavoured to disprove. They said, "His Disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept:" now this was the most absurd falsehood that ever was contrived; it confutes itself; for it might be asked, 'If you were *not* asleep, Why did you suffer them to take him away? and if you *were* asleep, How could you tell that they did take him?'

The last testimony shall be from *God himself*. Jesus had said, that after his ascension to his Father, he would send down the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and that the Father also would send the Spirit in his

name. Accordingly on the day of Pentecost, God poured out the Spirit upon the Disciples, and immediately after upon great numbers of his enemies, and thereby bore the strongest testimony both to the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Here then are the united testimonies of *Angels*, of *Friends*, of *Enemies*, and of *God* himself: if these be not sufficient, further arguments would be multiplied to no purpose.

We come then,

III. To set before you the uses which we should make of this doctrine—

Doctrines are of no value any further than they have a practical effect: in order therefore to improve that which has been now established, permit me to point out in two or three particulars the use which we are taught to make of it.

We should, in the first place, consider the Resurrection of Christ *as a pledge of our resurrection*. In the Old Testament the resurrection of the body was but obscurely intimated; but in the New Testament it is clearly revealed. Whatever difficulties may appear to arise from the innumerable changes which our bodies shall have undergone, He who first created us out of nothing, knows how to reunite our scattered atoms; and with him all things are possible. Moreover he has assured us, that he will do so: He has told us, that this frame of ours, which is sown in the earth a weak, corrupt, dishonoured body, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory. Of this the Resurrection of Christ is a pledge; for the Apostle says, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.” The first-fruits were a sheaf taken from the field, and waved before the Lord as the appointed means of obtaining his blessings upon the whole harvest: so we, by virtue of Christ’s Resurrection, and through the favour which he has procured for us, shall in due time be raised, and “our vile body shall be made like unto his glorious body.” Let us remember therefore, that this life

is only a state of probation for another ; and that, though our mortal part sleep for a little season in the dust, "the hour is coming," as our Lord expressly tells us, "when all that are in the grave shall hear *his* voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

Another use which we should make of Christ's Resurrection is, to consider it as *a pattern of our life*. In this view the Holy Scriptures frequently represent it : St. Paul tells us that "We must be planted in the likeness of Christ's Resurrection;" that "like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life : " and again he says, "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more ; death hath no more dominion over him ; for in that he died, he died unto sin once ; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God : likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus plainly is his Resurrection proposed to us as a pattern for our life ; and this it should be, in the source, the manner, and the end of it. As to the *source* of his Resurrection, it was by the glorious power and operation of the Father : It is by the same divine power that we must be quickened from our death in trespasses and sins : that same Spirit which re-animated his body must restore our souls to life. As to the *manner* of his Resurrection, it was irresistible ; the stone, the seal, the guard were all in vain. So must we break through every obstacle that might detain us in the ways of sin. No desire of man's applause, no regard to worldly interests, no delight in sensual indulgence, must keep us from following the steps of our Divine Master. As to the *end* of his Resurrection, he rose, that he might "live unto God : " and such must be our life on earth ; we must live unto God in a state of holy communion with him, making his word our rule, his glory our aim, and his service the joy and delight of our souls : nor is there any doubt, but that a life, thus begun in this world, will

issue, like Christ's, in a life of endless happiness and glory.

The last use of his Resurrection which I propose to mention, is, that *we should make it the ground of our hope*. Our salvation is most generally ascribed to the death of Christ; but sometimes also to his Resurrection: and when St. Paul mentions them as joint grounds of our hope, he seems to lay the greater stress upon his Resurrection; "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, *rather* that is risen again." Nor is this without reason; for, by means of his Resurrection, *he is enabled to execute his priestly office*. The High Priest under the law was not only to slay the sacrifice, but to carry its blood within the vail, to sprinkle it before the mercy-seat, and to cover the mercy-seat with a cloud of incense: and this, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews informs us, Jesus is now doing: he has offered himself a sacrifice for our sins, and now he is entered into the highest heavens with his own blood, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. By his Resurrection also, *we are assured, that God has accepted his sacrifice on our behalf*: for if it had not been accepted in this view, Christ must have deceived his followers, and God must have countenanced that deception, by giving the author of it such a signal testimony of his approbation: and as God would not have done this, we may look to him now with confidence as a reconciled Father: and we are fully warranted to do so, because St. Peter has said, that "God raised up Jesus from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God." We are further assured by the Resurrection of Christ, that *he has all power committed to him in heaven and in earth*, and is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him: and therefore St. Peter says again, that "we are begotten to a *lively* hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." But that particular consideration, which above all renders the Resurrection of Christ a ground of hope, is, that *he rose*, as he died, not in a private capacity, but *as the Head and Representative of all his*

people; on which account we are said to be "risen in him," and to be now "sitting with him in heavenly places." However therefore the members of his mystical body upon earth may be still contending with the enemies of their salvation, they may rejoice in an assured expectation of victory through Christ their Head: they may already triumph in the thought, that the guilt of their sin is expiated; that God is reconciled; that the hosts of hell are vanquished; that heaven is opened; that grace is promised; and that glory is reserved for them at their departure hence. Who then would not hope in this exalted Saviour, especially when we are so expressly told that he rose again for our justification?

Seeing then that his Resurrection enables him to execute his priestly office; seeing it assures us that his sacrifice is accepted for us; seeing it is the means of his being invested with almighty power; and seeing that by means of it his whole mystical body is risen and exalted with him, happy shall we be, if He be our hope and our confidence: but if He be not, we must be entirely hopeless and undone for ever; for there neither is nor can be any other ground of hope: we may have the faith of Abraham, the repentance of David, the self-denial of John the Baptist, the knowledge of the Apostles, and the fidelity of Stephen; yet all in vain; if Christ be not risen, all this will profit us nothing; we must inevitably perish notwithstanding all; for thus says the Apostle, in a fore-cited passage, "If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins; then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished:" so that Abraham, David, John the Baptist, the first martyr, Stephen, yea and all the Apostles, are perished, if Christ be not risen. If then these words of St. Paul be true, we see the pernicious tendency of their doctrines who would persuade us to renounce our dependence upon Christ, and to rely on our own works as the ground of our hope. What! are we better than those saints of old? Or would it avail us any thing if we were? No: we might be possessed of every virtue that ever adorned a human being, and

in the highest degree that it ever appeared in a fallen creature, and perish at last, if we made any thing but Christ the ground of our hope. Let us look then to this exalted Saviour: let us regard his Resurrection as *the pledge of our resurrection, the pattern of our life, and the ground of our hope*; and then we may adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle; "Who is he that shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again."

MDXCII.

THE GOSPEL TO BE FIRST PREACHED AT JERUSALEM.

Luke xxiv. 46, 47. *Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

THE Apostles were to be Christ's chosen witnesses respecting all that he had said, and done, and suffered in the world. To qualify them for this office, he gave them all needful instruction, not only whilst he sojourned openly among men, but in the interval between his resurrection and ascension. He opened to them more particularly the principal types and prophecies that related to him, and "then opened their understandings also that they might understand them:" and thus, by exhibiting the Gospel more fully to their view, and strengthening their organs of vision to behold them, he prepared them for the ministry which they were now speedily to undertake.

The necessity of the death and resurrection of Christ we have before considered*. We now fix our attention on the direction which he gave them,

I. To preach the Gospel to all nations—

The Gospel comprehends two points, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"—

* See Disc. on Luke xxiv. 26.

[Repentance is unknown to the law: *that says*, 'Do this, and live;' and in the event of transgression, denounces a curse against us^b. Whatever there was of repentance enjoined by Moses and the Prophets, it was altogether from a respect to that sacrifice which was in due time to be offered for the sins of men. That it is an evangelical duty, appears from its comprehending the substance of John's preaching^c, and of Christ himself^d, and of the Apostles also, both at, and after, the day of Pentecost^e — — — and to bring men to it, was the end for which Christ died and rose again. This therefore must be preached as an essential part of the Gospel.

"Remission of sins" also is a distinguishing feature of the Gospel of Christ: it is indeed the glory of the Gospel, that it makes provision for our attainment of that blessing. Not that the remission of sins is bestowed on *account of* our repentance: repentance prepares the mind for a due reception of it; but it is for the sake of Christ only that it is bestowed: and therefore in our preaching we must particularly mark, that this mercy is the purchase of his blood, and the gift of his grace.]

These are to be preached to all nations—

[The blessings of the Mosaic dispensation were confined to the House of Israel; but those of the Gospel are to be extended to all mankind. They are equally *necessary* for all, *free* for all, *effectual* for all: there is not a human being that does not need to repent and seek remission of sins in the name of Christ; for "there is no name but his, whereby any man can be saved." Nor is any person excluded from these mercies, if he do not himself thrust them away from him; for "the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." Nor shall any have reason to complain that they are not sufficient for him; for "all that believe are justified for all things." Hence the offer of them must be made to all; "we must go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."]

Our Lord however enjoined his Apostles—

II. To begin their ministration of it at Jerusalem—

It had been foretold that "the law should go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." But there were also important reasons in our Lord's mind, why his Gospel should in the first instance be published there. It would be eminently useful,

1. To confirm his truth—

^b Gal. iii. 10.

^c Matt. iii. 2.

^d Matt. iv. 17.

^e Acts ii. 38. and iii. 19. and xvii. 30.

[If the Apostles had left Jerusalem, and gone at once to the heathen, it would have appeared as if they had despaired of succeeding where their testimony might be inquired into, and were practising an imposition on those who were unable to contradict them. Thus the Gospel would have been universally regarded as "a cunningly-devised fable." But by beginning at the very place where their Master was crucified, and bearing their testimony respecting his resurrection, in the very place where he had been put to death, and before the people who were most interested in controverting their statements; and being enabled too to confirm their word with signs and miracles; being successful also in convincing hundreds and thousands that Christ was indeed risen, and was the only Saviour of the world; all this carried such conviction along with it, that even to this hour the enemies of Christianity are confounded by it, nor can find any reasonable plea for doubting what is so firmly and incontrovertibly established — — —]

2. To magnify his mercy—

[When we reflect on all the miracles that Christ had wrought in support of his assertions, and what indignities had been offered to him by all ranks and orders of people at Jerusalem; and at last what a cruel death they had inflicted on him; we might well expect that he should exclude that murderous city from any share of his mercy. He might well have said to his Disciples, Go and "preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations;" but come not near Jerusalem, that wicked city, that has filled up the measure of its iniquities in the murder of its Messiah. But instead of laying any such injunction on them, he commands them to be peculiarly mindful of that city, and to begin their ministrations there: so that, if they should have access to the priests, who demanded sentence against him, or to any of the people, who, in the various ways, by mockings, by scourgings, by nailing him to the cross, by piercing him with the spear, executed it upon him, they might declare to them his readiness to forgive all their trespasses, and, by the blood he had shed, to cleanse them from the guilt of shedding it. What wonderful mercy was here! James and John, upon a small provocation that was offered him, would have called down fire from heaven to consume a whole village: but their Lord, after having sustained the utmost injuries that ingenious cruelty could inflict, was anxious only for the salvation of the persons that had inflicted them. Here was mercy, such as none but God could exercise^f.]

3. To encourage sinners to the end of time—

^f Hos. xi. 8, 9.

[It is common with men, when convinced of sin, to spond, as if they had sinned beyond the reach of mercy: the advantages they have lost, the favours they have abused, the iniquities they have committed, seem to form such a load of guilt as can never be removed from their souls. But who ever lost more advantages, or abused more favours, or committed greater iniquities, than they who "crucified the Lord of glory?" Yet *they* were the *first* objects of our Redeemer's pity and compassion. So then shall it be with all who truly desire to find acceptance with him: "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" even as Paul "obtained mercy, that in him, as the very chief of sinners, God might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we would entreat you,

1. To embrace this salvation—

["To you is the word of this salvation sent;" and as ambassadors from Christ, we beseech you to receive it with all thankfulness. Nor think it a hard matter to repent, and flee to Christ, when the remission of your sins is suspended on it, and shall be insured by it — — — O let not Christ shed his blood in vain; nor us, as his ministers, commend to you his grace in vain! — — —]

2. To imitate this example—

[Do you admire this unbounded love of Christ to sinners? Know that, in this, "he has left you an example, that you should follow his steps." You have been greatly injured perhaps by a fellow-creature: return not then the injury; but render good for evil, and blessing for cursing. This is to tread in the steps of Christ, and to approve yourselves his true Disciples. "If your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: and labour to heap coals of fire on his head," to melt him into love. "Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good^s."]]

^s This may be made an useful subject for MISSIONS TO THE JEWS, by shewing, that whilst we *imitate the example* of Christ in love to our enemies, we should *follow his direction* in seeking with peculiar and unremitting diligence the restoration and salvation of the Jews: for, where and when were we ever authorized to neglect them, as we have done for 1800 years.

MDXCIII.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

Luke xxiv. 50—53. *And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

AMIDST the various proofs given by our Lord to his Disciples respecting his Messiahship, there was one of pre-eminent authority, namely, the ascending up to heaven in their immediate presence. He had not risen in their presence, because his frequent appearances to them for the space of forty days after his resurrection would be a sufficient evidence to them that he had risen: but if, in his ascent to heaven, he had withdrawn privately, they would not have known whither he was gone; since they could not go up thither to obtain a personal interview with him, or to ascertain the truth of his ascension. Hence our blessed Lord, having accomplished all that was necessary to be done on earth, led them out to Mount Olivet, and went up from the midst of them to heaven, giving them ocular demonstration that his removal from them was such as he had taught them to expect: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father*.”

In the account here given us by St. Luke, we notice two things;

I. Our Lord's departure from his Disciples—

“Having loved his own, he loved them to the end;” and expressed his love to them most particularly in the very instant of his departure: “He lifted up his hands, and blessed them:” and it was in this very act that he was taken up from them; “While he blessed them, he was parted from them.” Now his removal in the midst of this act ought not to be

* John xvi. 28.

passed over as a mere accidental and uninteresting occurrence; it surely may be considered as intimating to us,

1. What was his *object in coming into the world*—

[We are told by St. Peter, that “God sent him to *bless us*.” Man was cursed, as a transgressor of God’s law: nor could he, by any means, remove the curse or obtain any blessing whatever. Sin interposed an insurmountable obstacle in his way. But Jesus undertook to remove this obstacle: to expiate the guilt of sin by the sacrifice of himself, and thus to open a way for man’s reconciliation with his offended God. This sacrifice he had now offered, and had “finished the work which God had given him to do.” Now therefore he authoritatively pronounced his Disciples blessed: blessed, as believing in his name; blessed, as interested in his death; blessed, as committed to his protection; and blessed, as fellow-heirs of his glory. Just as the high-priest, after offering his sacrifice, was to bless the people^c, so now Jesus intimated that the end of his incarnation was accomplished, and that, as our Great High-priest, he was empowered to bless his people with all spiritual and eternal blessings^d.]

2. What should be his *occupation when he was departed from it*—

[He was not now going to relinquish their concerns: on the contrary, he would still be as mindful of them as ever. He was going to heaven upon their business; “as their forerunner,” “to prepare places for them;” “to make continual intercession for them;” to take on himself the management of the universe for them;” and to receive a fulness of all gifts and graces for them, that “they might receive out of it” according to their several necessities. His removal, though it interrupted the sight of his person, and the hearing of his voice, should not interrupt the communication of his blessings: He would still load his Disciples with the richest blessings, and “not *them* only, but also all who should believe in him through their word:” and, if we now look to him with the eye of faith, we may behold him, as it were, at this very instant occupied as he was at the moment of his departure from the world: he is still blessing, blessing, blessing his believing people: “having received gifts for men, he is daily and hourly bestowing them, even on the most rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell among them^e:” yea, he will yet further extend his favours to

^b Acts iii. 26.

^d Gen. xiv. 18—20.

^c Lev. ix. 22.

^e Ps. lxxviii. 18.

the remotest corners of the earth: for “in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed^f.”]

If we look only to the past history, we shall be surprised at,

II. The effect it produced upon them—

When our Lord had told them of his intended departure, they were “filled with sorrow;” but now that he was really gone, they were altogether as full of joy: but they were *now* better instructed in the nature of his kingdom than they had been before. Indeed even to the last they retained some expectation of a temporal kingdom^g: but his departure from them effectually dissipated that delusion; and taught them to look up to him for far higher blessings.

Now the effect which was produced in *them* by the *sight* of his ascension, ought equally to be wrought in *us* by the *recollection* of it; and I shall have addressed you to no purpose, if you do not depart from this place with a measure of those very feelings with which the Apostles were impressed on this occasion. I call upon you therefore now,

1. To adore him—

[He is worthy of all adoration: nor can we doubt but that the “worship” paid to him by his Disciples, was such as they paid to Jehovah himself. The prayer which they almost immediately afterwards offered up to heaven for the appointment of a successor to Judas, was addressed to HIM^h, just as Stephen’s afterwards was, at the very time that he beheld the Father himself sitting on his throneⁱ. Let us then adore HIM as our incarnate God: and remember that, in so doing, we most truly and acceptably serve our heavenly Father^k.]

2. To rejoice in him—

[Who can contemplate HIM seated on his throne of glory, and constituted “Head over all things to his Church,” and not rejoice in him? We are commanded to “rejoice in him always^l”: such joy is the characteristic mark of all his people^m: and it ought to be as elevated and as fervent, as our feeble nature will admit ofⁿ. If the Apostles, notwithstanding they

^f Gen. xii. 3. Ps. lxxii. 17.

^g Acts i. 24.

^h John v. 22, 23. Phil. ij. 9—14.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 3.

^j Acts i. 6, 7.

^k Acts vii. 59, 60.

^l Phil. iv. 4.

^m 1 Pet. i. 8.

were bereft of his bodily presence, and were as yet but partially acquainted with the benefits that were to result from his ascension, "returned to Jerusalem with great joy," much more should we, to whom the full extent of those benefits is opened, "rejoice with exceeding great joy." Let Israel then "rejoice in him that made him and redeemed him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King^o."

3. To consecrate ourselves to him—

[The Apostles from this time appear to have given themselves up wholly to the exercises of devotion. This was right in their peculiar circumstances; but was not intended as a precedent for us. We have civil and social duties that call for our attention, and which must on no account be neglected. Yet, as far as relates to the affections of the soul, we must consecrate ourselves as entirely to God as they. We should be "sanctified wholly to the Lord, in body, soul, and spirit^r." He has "bought us with a price; therefore we should glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his^q." Let us then serve him *in his temple* at the appointed seasons of public worship; and let us serve him *in our closets*, where no eye seeth us but his.]

4. To wait for the accomplishment of all his promises—

[Our Lord had promised to his Disciples, that "they should in the space of a few days be baptized with the Holy Ghost;" and had told them to wait at Jerusalem for that gift^t. At Jerusalem therefore they waited in expectation of the promised blessing. And have we no promises to be fulfilled to us? Has he not given us "exceeding great and precious promises," comprehending every thing that we can desire for body or for soul, for time or for eternity? Let us then wait for the accomplishment of them to our souls. In due time "Jesus will come again from heaven in like manner as he went to heaven:" and then will that last promise be fulfilled, "I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." O that in the mean time he may find us with "our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed," and ourselves as those who "wait for the coming of their Lord!"

^o Ps. cxlix. 2.

^q 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^r 1 Thess. v. 23.

^t ver. 49. and Acts i. 4, 5.

J O H N.

MDXCIV.

DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

John i. 1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

WHAT astonishing majesty and dignity are displayed in these brief but comprehensive words! The other Evangelists commence their histories at the period of our Saviour's incarnation : but St. John carries us back to eternity itself ; and informs us, not only what Christ did and suffered, but who he was. He calls him by a very peculiar name ; " The Word ;" and, in other places, " The Word of Life^a," " The Word of God^b." This name, as applicable to the Messiah, was not altogether unknown to the Jews^c : and it seems peculiarly proper to the Son, because it is by the Son that God has in all ages *revealed his mind* to man. And perhaps this very explanation of the term was intended to be conveyed to us by St. John, when he says, within a few verses after my text, " No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who *is in the bosom of his Father*, he hath declared him^d."

But, without dwelling upon matters of conjecture, let us consider,

I. The testimony here given to the Lord Jesus Christ—

^a 1 John i. 1, 2.

^b Rev. xix. 13.

^c See Bishop Pearson on the Creed, pp. 117, 118. ^d ver. 18

The beloved Apostle, speaking of the Lord Jesus. here declares,

1. His eternal existence—

["In the beginning was the Word," even before the creature existed, either in heaven or on earth: and from him *every* created being derived its existence^a. So St. Paul also informs us: "By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things; and by him all things consist^f." Though he was born into the world in time, yet in his divine nature he existed from eternity: "He was the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^g:" "His goings-forth were of old from everlasting^h:" "He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the lastⁱ."]]

2. His distinct personality—

[From all eternity "he was with God;" "having a glory with him before the worlds were made^k;" and having a perfect participation of all that the Father possessed, whether of wisdom and knowledge^l, or of authority and power^m. This appears from the council held, as it were, between the Father and the Son, respecting the formation of manⁿ; and man's consequent expulsion from Paradise^o; and the confounding of the projects of man's apostate race by changing their language at Babel^p. Hence the Lord Jesus is said to have "come forth from God^q," even "from his bosom," where had been his everlasting abode. The importance of this truth is marked by the repetition of it by St. John, in the words following my text, "The same was in the beginning with God."]]

3. His proper deity—

["The Word was God," even "the mighty God^r," "the great God^s," "God over all, blessed for ever^t." "He was in the form of God; and thought it no robbery to be equal with God^u;" and was therefore rightly "named Emmanuel, God with us^v;" and is with truth declared to be "God manifest in the flesh^w."]]

Now, that this is not a mere speculative subject, I will proceed to shew, by pointing out,

^a ver. 3.

^b Mic. v. 2.

^c Matt. xi. 27.

^d Gen. iii. 22.

^e Isai. 9. 6.

^f Phil. ii. 6.

^g Col. i. 16, 17.

^h Rev. i. 8, 11.

ⁱ John v. 17.

^j Gen. xi. 7.

^k Tit. ii. 13.

^l Matt. i. 23.

^m Heb. xiii. 8.

ⁿ John xvii. 5.

^o Gen. i. 26.

^p John xvi. 27, 28.

^q Rom. ix. 5.

^r 1 Tim. iii. 16.

II. The deep interest we have in it—

On the very face of the question, "Whether our Saviour be God, or only a created being?" it cannot fail of appearing a subject of extreme importance. Know, then, that Christ is truly God, as well as man: and on this truth depends,

1. The efficacy of all that he did and suffered for us on earth—

[Had he been only a creature, he could only have done what was his duty to do; and therefore he could have *merited* nothing at the hands of God: or, at all events, could have merited only for himself. But being God, his whole undertaking was gratuitous; there was no obligation lying upon him, to do any thing, or suffer any thing, for us. What he did and suffered, therefore, may well be put to our account; more especially since it was so concerted between him and his Father, when he undertook to redeem our ruined race. His sufferings, though only for a season, may well be regarded as equivalent to the eternal sufferings of man; and his obedience to the law be justly considered as if all mankind had obeyed it. On both the one and the other his Deity stamps an infinite value; so that, "he having been made sin for us, we may well be made the righteousness of God in him^a."]

2. The efficacy of all that he is yet doing for us in heaven—

[There is our adorable Saviour seated at the right hand of God; and all judgment is committed to him, that he may complete for his people the work which he began on earth. He is appointed "Head over all things to the Church^a." But supposing him to be a mere creature, how can he attend to all at once, and supply the necessities of all, in every quarter of the universe, at the same instant of time? But there is no room for such a question as that, seeing he is the omnipresent, omniscient, Almighty God. "Our help is, indeed, laid upon One that is mighty^b," upon One that is Almighty, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^c." We need not fear, therefore, however great our necessities; but be fully assured, that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him^d."]

BEHOLD then, brethren,

1. How inconceivably great is the condescension of our God!

^a 2 Cor. v. 21.

^a Eph. i. 22.

^b Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^c Col. ii. 9.

^d Heb. vii. 25.

[I wonder not at the unbelief of those who call in question the Divinity of Christ: for if it were not so fully revealed, as that it is impossible for a truly enlightened man to doubt it, I should be ready to doubt it myself; so inconceivable does it appear, that God should become a man, and make himself the surety and substitute of his own rebellious creatures. But he *is* God, and *therefore* can do it: he *is* God, and *therefore* cannot be judged by the finite capacity of man. In doing what he has done, he has acted like himself. He *is* God, and *therefore* I believe all that he has done for sinful man. Though himself *eternal*, he has been born *in time*: though eternally *with God*, he has come down and tabernacled *with man*: though himself the true and *Living God*, he has become *a man*, yea, and *died for man* upon the cross. I believe it, because he has revealed it. It believe it, because nothing less than this would have been adequate to my necessities. And were this not true, I should most gladly take my portion for ever under rocks and mountains.]

2. What unbounded consolation has he provided for sinful man!

[This doctrine meets my every want. I have guilt, which nothing less than "the blood of God" can wash away*. I have corruptions, which none but the Spirit of God can subdue and mortify. I have wants, which none but the all-sufficient God can supply. But, having Jehovah for my friend, my surety, my righteousness, my all, I fear nothing. I hope in *him*; and believe in *him*; and glory in *him*; and make *him* "all my salvation and all my desire." Trusting in him, I will defy all my enemies†: and, "believing in him," I will anticipate in my soul all the glory and blessedness of heaven‡.]

* Acts xx. 28.

† Rom. viii. 31.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 8.

MDXCV.

CHRIST THE ONLY TRUE LIGHT.

John i. 9. *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

AS in the material world there is but one source of light to all the heavenly bodies; so in the spiritual world there is one Sun of Righteousness, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. There are other lights: John himself was a burning and a shining light. But he, and all the rest, shined with

a borrowed lustre. Christ is the only true source both of light and life; as St. John has told us; and as I propose in the present discourse to shew.

I. He was the only true light previous to his incarnation—

As being the Creator of all things, it was He who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." As the Former both of angels and men, he gave to each their intellectual and moral powers. Men, the lower order of beings, he endued with reason and conscience; distinguishing them by these faculties from the brute creation, which possess only that which we call instinct. When man had fallen, and lost, to a considerable degree, the faculties with which he had been invested, the Lord Jesus, agreeably to the covenant he had entered into with the Father, undertook to restore to man such a measure of light as his necessities required. This he did,

1. By the republication of his law—

[It was the Son of God who led his people out of Egypt through the wilderness: for that people, by their murmurings, we are told, "tempted Christ^a." The law, therefore, both moral and ceremonial, we suppose to have been given by him. At all events, we are sure that they were, each of them in its place, rays emanating from him; "he being the end of both^b," the *end* to which each looked, and the *end* by which both were fulfilled. The moral was "a schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith^c:" and the ceremonial shadowed him forth, in all his offices^d.]

2. By a long train of prophecies—

[It was "by the Spirit of Christ" that all the prophets spoke, from the very beginning^e. And thus, with progressive clearness, was the mind of God revealed, relative to the restoration of fallen man. Whatever was made known respecting the Father and his eternal councils, it was all declared by the Lord Jesus Christ^f. No information on these inscrutable subjects ever proceeded from any other quarter: all the light that was in the world emanated from Christ alone; and was confined to his chosen people. All the rest of the world were left in the grossest darkness that can be imagined^g.]

^a 1 Cor. x. 9.

^b Rom. x. 4.

^c Gal. iii. 23, 24.

^d Col. ii. 17.

^e 1 Pet. i. 12.

^f ver. 18.

^g Isai. lx. 2.

Moreover,

II. He was the only true light, also, during his sojourning on earth—

[So he himself repeatedly and strongly affirms^a — — — He explained the law, which had been obscured and corrupted by the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees¹ — — — and made himself known, in the plainest terms, as the only Saviour of the world: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me².” Nor was he less a light by his example, “shewing, in the whole of his deportment, how men ought to walk and to please God,” even “by following his steps³,” and “walking as he walked⁴.” Hence he cautioned the people of that day: “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light⁵.”]

I add, that,

III. He is the only true light at this day—

[“God, in covenant, gave him to be a light to the Gentiles;” “to bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and to lead them in paths which they had not known; to make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight⁶.” And all this he does at this moment, even as St. Paul has testified respecting him⁷. What other source of light has any man but the written word, which our blessed Lord has inspired? or what other teacher has any man but his Holy Spirit, which Christ has promised, “to guide us into all truth?” The heathen philosophers, so far from adding one ray of light to the Scriptures of truth, have only “darkened counsel by words without knowledge.” “The truth of God has been foolishness to them;” and “their wisdom has been altogether foolishness in the sight of God.” Indeed, as the blind cannot see even the meridian sun, so “neither can the natural man, by any faculties of his own, discern the things of the Spirit⁸.” “The eyes of our understanding must be opened by the Spirit of God, before we can be fully brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel⁹.” As “the Day-spring from on high hath visited the world, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace¹⁰;” so must “the Day-star arise in our hearts,” before

^a John viii. 12. ix. 5. and xii. 46. ¹ Matt. v. 21, 22, 27, 28.

² John xiv. 6. ³ 1 Pet. ii. 21. ⁴ 1 John ii. 6.

⁵ John xii. 35, 36. ⁶ Isai. xlii. 6, 7, 16. ⁷ Acts xxvi. 23.

⁸ 1 Cor. ii. 14. ⁹ Eph. i. 18. ¹⁰ Luke i. 78, 79.

we shall have any just discernment of "the things which have been freely given to us of God^t."]]

INQUIRE then, I pray you,

1. What light you have received from the Lord Jesus Christ—

[I ask not what proficiency you have attained in worldly knowledge; for that, however excellent, can never save the soul. But I ask, "Has God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shined in your heart, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^u?" — — — *This* is saving knowledge: this alone can save you^x. And this can be obtained from none but the Lord Jesus Christ, whose office it is to "open the blind eyes^y," and to "make you wise unto salvation by faith in him." To every one amongst you, then, I say, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light^z."]]

2. How far you are reflecting around you the light you have received—

[This is done by all the planets, moving in their orbits: and this must be done by all who profess to receive their light from Christ. All must "be as stars in his hands^a:" all must "reflect his virtues^b:" and, though it must of necessity be, that "one star should differ from another star in glory," yet "must all shine as lights in a dark world^c;" and, in all who are truly and savingly enlightened, "their light will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day^d." Let it be seen then, my brethren, by your life and conversation, "whose you are, and whom you serve." Let Christ be your pattern in all things: endeavour to "walk in the light, as he is in the light^e:" so shall you be found "children of the light and of the day^f:" and "Christ shall be glorified in you," both in this world and in the world to come^g.]

^t 1 Cor. ii. 9—12.

^u 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^x John xvii. 3.

^y Isai. xxxv. 5, 6. Matt. xi. 5.

^z Eph. v. 14.

^a Rev. i. 16.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 9. the Greek. and 2 Cor. iii. 3.

^c Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^d Prov. iv. 18.

^e 1 John i. 7.

^f 1 Thess. v. 4, 5.

^g 2 Thess. i. 12.

MDXCVI.

BENEFIT OF RECEIVING CHRIST.

John i. 10—12. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

THE blessings which administer to our worldly interest or bodily comfort, are equally welcomed by persons of all ranks and conditions: but those which have relation only to our spiritual good, are despised by many, and desired by very few. The light of the sun is not less prized by one than by another: all are sensible of its benefits, and value it accordingly. But “the Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon us,” and the benighted world regards him not: “he shines in the darkness, and the darkness apprehends him not^a.” Some however there are, who rejoice in his advent: and as they only have learned to appreciate his worth, they only shall enjoy the full benefits he confers.

The words of the Evangelist will lead us to shew,

I. The contempt poured on Christ by the unbelieving world—

What was said of him in that day is equally true in this:

1. His own *creatures* “do not know him”—

[It was Christ who formed the universe: “the world was made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made^b.” He has moreover “been in the world” from the very beginning, “upholding it by his power^c,” and ordering every thing in it by his superintending providence. Yet, before his incarnation, he was not known; neither yet now is he known as the Creator and Governor of the world. His name indeed is known: but he is considered only as a great prophet. The generality of those who *doctrinally* maintain his proper Deity, never *practically* realize the thought, that “by him all things subsist^d.”]

2. His own *people* “do not receive him”—

^a ver. 5.

^c Heb. i. 3.

^b ver. 3. with the text.

^d Col. i. 17.

[The Jews were called "Christ's *own*," because he had separated them from all other people, brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and derived his human nature from the stock of Abraham, their father. Their very country was called "Emmanuel's land". But we are *his* in a still more appropriate sense; because he has bought us with his blood; and we have been baptized into his name; and profess ourselves his followers. Yet we "do not really receive him," any more than the Jews themselves did. We do not receive him *in the character which he bears in the Holy Scriptures*[†] — — — We do not receive him *for the ends and purposes for which he came*[‡] — — —]

Alas! what contempt is this which we pour upon him! We can shudder at the indignities offered him by the Jews; but we ourselves are no less criminal than the people who crucified and slew him: they through ignorance apprehended and executed him as a malefactor: we, with our eyes open, cry, "Hail, Master!" and betray him^h.]

But that we may not continue to treat him thus, let us consider,

II. The honour he confers on those who believe in him—

A "receiving of Christ," and a "believing in him," are represented in the text as of precisely the same import. It is superfluous therefore to add any thing more in explanation of the terms. The benefits accruing from faith are the objects which next demand our attention. Unspeakable is the honour of becoming a child of God: yet to every one that believes in him, our blessed Lord gives,

1. To bear this relation to God—

["To the Jews belonged the adoption[†]," as far as related to the external privileges of it. But we, on believing, "are made partakers of the Divine nature[‡]." We become the children of God as well by regeneration as adoption: yea, faith is at once the means[§], and the evidence^{||}, of our sonship with

• Isai. viii. 8.

† He is a Prophet to teach us, a Priest to atone for us, a King to rule over us and in us. Do we receive him under these characters?

‡ He came to justify us by his blood, to sanctify us by his grace, and to save us with an everlasting salvation. Do we receive him for these ends?

^h Matt. xxvi. 49.

[†] Rom. ix. 4.

[‡] 2 Pet. i. 4.

[§] Gal. iii. 26.

^{||} 1 John v. 1.

God. There is no interval of time left for us to give proofs of our sincerity, before God will acknowledge us as his: but the instant we believe in Christ, we are "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty^a."

2. To enjoy the privileges of this relation—

[The children of a stranger are not noticed by us, while our own children are admitted freely into our presence, and are the objects of our tenderest solicitude, our unremitted attention. We feed them, we clothe them, we protect them, we provide every thing for them that is suited to our circumstances, and that will contribute to their welfare. In all these respects believers find God a Father to them. They can go into his presence, "crying, Abba, Father^o!" and obtain from him whatever is necessary either for their support or comfort.]

3. To possess an inheritance worthy of that relation—

[Parents account it a duty to provide for the future maintenance of their children, and not merely for their present subsistence. With this view they lay up fortunes for them, which they are to inherit after the decease of their parents. Similar to this is the provision made for those who believe in Christ. They are "begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading^p." "Being sons, they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Nor shall they merely divide their Father's inheritance among them; but every one of them shall enjoy the whole, and have his happiness enlarged, rather than diminished, by the communication of it to others.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. The folly of unbelievers—

[One would suppose, that, in calling them to believe in Jesus Christ, we urged them to make the greatest sacrifices, and to resign every thing that could conduce to their happiness. But, on the contrary, we only invite them to "*receive*;" to receive "the greatest gift" which God himself is able to bestow^r: to receive Him, in whom they will find all that they can possibly desire. We require them to surrender nothing but what will make them miserable; and to receive nothing which will not make them happy. How unreasonable does their conduct appear when viewed in this light! If we were to offer them bags of gold, we should find them willing enough to accept as many as we could bestow. But when we exhort

^a 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^o Gal. iv. 6.

^p 1 Pet. i. 3.

^q Rom. viii. 17.

^r John iv. 10.

them to accept *Him* who is of more value than ten thousand worlds, they turn a deaf ear to our most importunate entreaties. See, ye unbelievers, see your extreme folly! and remember, that the day is coming, when that rejection of Christ, in which you now glory, will become the ground of your bitterest lamentation.]

2. The unspeakable benefit of faith—

[There are many things which put a considerable difference between one man and another. The influence of wealth and dignity exalts some far above the level of their fellow-creatures. The acquisition of knowledge and wisdom has no less effect in elevating the characters and conditions of men. But all the distinctions in the universe do not avail to dignify a man so much as faith. Faith brings Christ into the soul, and puts the poorest of men into the possession of "unsearchable riches." Faith makes him, from a child of the devil, a child of God; from an heir of misery, an heir of glory. Faith elevates him from death to life, from infamy to honour, from hell to heaven. "Faith, even though it be small as a grain of mustard-seed," produces all these wonderful effects. Cultivate then, my brethren, this divine principle. Labour to have it in more continued exercise. Let Christ, the greatest object of faith, be more and more precious to your soul. Thus shall you be really the most distinguished characters on earth, and ere long "inherit the kingdom prepared for you by your heavenly Father."]

MDXCVII.

CHRISTIANS BORN OF GOD.

John i. 13. *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

IT is obvious, that there is at this day, even as there was in the days of Christ himself, a most essential difference between persons enjoying the same privileges and making the same professions. All the Jews professed themselves to be the people of the Lord; and Christ came to them, as bearing that relation to him. But they did not all receive him. The great majority of the Jewish nation rejected him: as it is said, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not: but to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even

to them that believed on his name." Now, whence arose the difference between those widely-different persons? or from whence arises a similar difference amongst ourselves? The answer is given us in the words of my text: from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. To whom Believers are indebted for all that they possess—

This is marked with very peculiar precision :

It is not from any creature whatever that they receive one spiritual blessing—

[It is "not from blood," or from natural descent, that they obtain any thing. Ishmael was as much the child of Abraham as Isaac was; and Esau was the son of Isaac as much as Jacob: but their descent from holy parents was of no avail to transmit to them the grace of God. So, in after-ages, we are told, that "all were not Israel who were of Israel; neither because all were the seed of Abraham were they all children; that is, they who were the children of the flesh were not therefore the children of God; the children of promise alone being counted for the seed^a." So neither at this day does holiness flow in the blood of any person; nor can we become the Lord's people by virtue of our descent from the holiest of men.

"Nor is it of the will of the flesh," or by virtue of any power inherent in us, that we are made the Lord's people. All are equally "dead in trespasses and sins;" "nor can any man quicken his own soul."

"Nor is it of the will of man," or by any efforts of our friends, that we are made holy. We may adopt any person, whom we will, into our own family; but we cannot bring him into the family of God. Samuel, David, Hezekiah, would never have left their own children to perish, if they could, by any efforts of their own, have saved them: nor would Paul, who "had continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart for his brethren's sake," have failed to communicate to them effectual aid, if he had had it at his own disposal.]

It is "of God alone" that any true Believer "is born"—

["From God alone comes every good and perfect gift^b." If saving grace be imparted to any of us, it is owing to the exercise of his sovereign will, and the operation of his effectual grace. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. "Of his

^a Rom. ix. 7, 8.

^b Jam. i. 17.

own will begets he us with the word of truth^c." From all eternity did he select the objects of his choice, predestinating them to the adoption of children; that to all eternity they may be "to the praise of the glory of his grace^d." All this is altogether irrespective of any works of theirs, past, present, or future^e. In a word, that is true which the Apostle so strongly states in the Epistle to the Romans, and in such perfect conformity with the words of my text: "God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hath compassion on whom he will have compassion. So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy^f."]

This being, for the most part, an unpalatable truth, I will not leave it till I have established it beyond the possibility of doubt—

[Behold the persecuting Saul; and trace, in all its steps, the conversion of his soul. Read the account of it in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Disciples of the Lord, went unto the high-priest, and desired of him (he was altogether a volunteer in this matter) letters to Damascus (a foreign country, not under the government of Judah), to the synagogues; that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, (such was his humanity!) he might bring them bound to Jerusalem^g." I ask, Could any one of his party be further off from conversion than he? "But, as he journeyed, he came near to Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man^h." To him a man named Ananias was then sent by God himself, in these memorable words: "Go thy way to him; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israelⁱ." Thus was he converted; the only one of all the party, as far as we know;—he, the most embittered of them all, the ringleader of them all, the most unlikely of all. What a comment was this on the words of my text! and what an example of the truth contained in them! The Apostle, speaking of it to the Galatians, puts this very construction upon it all: "It pleased God, who

^c Jam. i. 18.

^d Eph. i. 4—6.

^e 2 Tim. i. 9. Tit. iii. 3—6.

^f Rom. ix. 15, 16.

^g Acts ix. 1, 2.

^h Acts ix. 3—7.

ⁱ Acts ix. 8—15.

separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen^k." Now precisely thus it is with every one that is brought to the faith of Christ: he is born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Nor is there one upon the face of the whole earth who must not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am^l."

Trusting that the point we have been endeavouring to establish is fully conceded to us, we will proceed to shew,

II. What encouragement we derive from that all-important consideration—

Unspeakably encouraging are these two thoughts connected with it:

1. All Believers have the same God to go unto for all that they can stand in need of—

[Had their divine life originated from man, either from themselves or others, they must have looked to man to carry it forward. But who that knows the weakness and mutability of man must not have trembled for them? The friend, by whose kind attentions they had been converted, is absent on a journey, or is dead, and his help can no more be obtained. Or the good dispositions which they themselves put forth, and by virtue of which they were brought to God, have been overpowered by temptation, and are no longer at their command. They feel a hardness of heart which they cannot remove, and a distraction of mind which they cannot fix. What then is to be done? The water has failed them, not in the channel merely, but at the fountain-head. But let them reflect on God as the alone source of all that they have possessed, and then they will have this rich consolation in the midst of all their trouble and perplexity: 'Who is it that has brought me hitherto? and what did He find in me as an inducement to him to magnify his grace in me? He saw nothing in me but sin: he loved me only because he would love me: he consulted nothing but his own sovereign will: he chose me, and not I him: and apprehended me, before he was apprehended by me. Then to him will I look: in him will I hope: to him will I apply. If "he was found of me when I sought him not, and made known to me when I inquired not after him," I may hope he will not turn his back upon me when I seek him; nor turn a deaf ear to me when I call upon him. My only ground of fear is, either that he is not able, or that

^k Gal. i. 15, 16.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 10.

he is not willing, to afford me the succour which I stand in need of. But of his ability how can I doubt, when I reflect on what he has already done for me, in quickening me when dead, and bringing me thus far on my journey heaven-ward? Nor can I doubt of his willingness to help me, since the very first motions of my heart towards him were the gift of his sovereign grace, who "gave me both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Surely these thoughts must afford unspeakable encouragement to the believer, under all the trials to which he can ever be exposed; whilst, on the contrary, if he had only a created power whereon to rely, he must on many occasions sink into utter despondency.]

2. The mercies they have received are to them a pledge of future blessings—

[This necessarily arises from the thought of God's electing love. For, why did he ever choose us? Was it to abandon us again? Why did he ever quicken us? Was it to give us over to death again? Why did he ever translate us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son? Was it that we might ultimately perish with an accumulated weight of condemnation? He has told us, that the gift of "his Holy Spirit is an earnest of our heavenly inheritance." Now, an earnest is a *part* of a payment, and a *pledge* that the remainder shall in due time be paid: and, consequently, the work of grace already wrought in the hearts of his people is a *pledge* that he will carry on and perfect it within them. For "he is a God that changeth not; and therefore we neither are, nor shall be, consumed." "His gifts and calling are without repentance or change of mind, on his part." "Whom he loveth, he loveth to the end." And the consideration of this is a rich consolation to his believing people; as he has said: God, "willing more abundantly to shew unto his people the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us." Hence the believer may be confident that "God will not cast him off;" but that, whatever he may have to contend with, "nothing shall ever be permitted to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."]

But that this subject may not be made an occasion of any undue confidence,

1. Let us inquire whether we have ever experienced this great change—

[It is evident there is a change to be experienced, which no created power can effect. Now then, I ask, Has any such

change taken place in *you*? Think again: It is a change that depends not on your descent from Christian parents; a change which no endeavours of friends can ever accomplish, and which no efforts of your own can ever merit or effect: it is a new creation; and a work of God alone, as much as the creation of the universe itself. Perhaps you will say, 'Tell me more distinctly wherein this change consists.' I will do so. It is "a receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ" as the gift of God to your souls; and "a believing in him" as your "all in all." To these is "the privilege of becoming the sons of God" assigned; and to these alone. If, then, you are "born of God," these marks must, of necessity, be found in you. You have felt your need of a Saviour; you have cried to God for mercy with your whole hearts: and you have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as "all your salvation and all your desire." Examine into this matter, my beloved brethren. Here is the precise point of difference between the children of God and the children of the wicked one. Those who are born of the flesh only, may be moral and externally religious: but the child of God lives altogether by faith on the Son of God, receiving all blessings out of his fulness, and improving them all for his glory. This is a new birth: and were you as moral as Nicodemus himself, you must experience it, at the peril of your souls; and, except ye be thus born from above, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God. I pray you, brethren, settle this well in your minds: for to those only who stand in this relation to their God is there "any inheritance among the saints in light."]

2. Let us endeavour to manifest it, by a suitable life and conversation—

[God had one only dear Son, whom he sent down from heaven to sojourn upon earth. And the Scripture fully informs us what dispositions he exercised, and what conduct he pursued. And every one who is born of God will follow his steps, and "walk as he walked." He will "no longer walk according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." He will be no longer of the world, any more than Jesus Christ was of the world. He will rise above it. He will be crucified unto it; and regard it as a crucified object, that has no longer any charms for him, or any power over him. His tempers, too, will be mortified and subdued. He will have the meekness and gentleness of Christ in his whole deportment: and, if he be not able perfectly to attain the measure that was in Christ Jesus, he will aspire after it, and be satisfied with nothing less. In a word, he will not live unto himself, but unto God, making it "his meat and his drink to

do the will of his Saviour and Redeemer." Now, then, brethren, this is the way in which you will live, if you are sons of God. "You will shine as lights in a dark world;" and "your light will shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day." Once attain this conformity to your Saviour's image, and you will need no one to tell you whence it came, or by whose power it has been wrought. You will readily give all the glory to your God; and ascribe on earth, as you will to all eternity ascribe in heaven, salvation to Him who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.]

MDXCVIII.

INCARNATION AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

John i. 14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

IN treating on divine subjects, the mind should be impressed with holy awe: whenever we approach them, we should apply to ourselves the injunction given to Moses, and "pull off our shoes as standing upon holy ground." But of all subjects, that of the incarnation of our blessed Lord should be contemplated with the profoundest reverence. It has heights and depths, which even the heavenly intelligences themselves are unable to explore. "They are ever looking into it;" and to all eternity will behold in it fresh wonders to admire. But "great as is this mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh," it cannot for one moment be questioned by any one who believes the Scriptures. The Evangelists, as inspired by the Holy Ghost, declare it; whilst, as "eye-witnesses of his Majesty," they attest it. Let us then with all humility of mind proceed to the consideration of the Apostle's testimony in our text; wherein we notice both the incarnation and the character of Christ.

I. The incarnation of Christ—

[The person here said to be made flesh, is "the Word:" and it is manifest, that *the Apostle speaks, as knowing that the persons to whom he spoke were familiar with the terms he used.*

It does not appear probable that the Jews should borrow the term *Logos* (here translated "the Word," and elsewhere translated "Wisdom,") from the Platonists; or that the Apostle would adopt it from them. We rather suppose that the Jews, and consequently the Apostle also, received the term from the Scriptures themselves: for the Psalmist says, "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made:" and Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, speaks of "Wisdom" in almost the same terms as the Apostle uses in reference to "the Word^a." At all events, we know from the whole preceding context, as also from the text itself, that the *Logos* or "the Word" is no other than "the only-begotten Son of God." We know that he subsisted from all eternity; that he was personally distinct from God the Father; that, nevertheless, he was truly and properly God; and, finally that, so far from being himself a creature, he was the Creator of all things, without any limitation or exception^b.

This divine Person (the Second Person in the ever-adorable Trinity,) "was made flesh;" that is, he assumed our nature with all its sinless infirmities; and "was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted" — — — In that state of humiliation he sojourned upon earth, as once he dwelt with his people in the wilderness; his Deity being veiled by human flesh, as formerly it had been by the Shechinah, the bright cloud, which, as the symbol of his presence, dwelt in the tabernacle first, and afterwards in the temple.

We stop not to enlarge upon this stupendous mystery; wishing rather to shorten our discussion, that we may have the more room for a practical improvement of it.]

The Apostle, as we might well expect, after mentioning the incarnation of Christ, proceeds to notice,

II. His character—

[In the primary sense of the passage, the terms "full of grace and truth" refer to the *official* character of Christ. He came to introduce a dispensation very different from that which had hitherto existed. The law which Moses had given to the Israelites "was a ministration of death and condemnation:" and though the ceremonial law had held forth hopes of pardon and acceptance, yet it consisted merely in ritual observances, which in themselves were of no value, and which could never take away sin. But Jesus Christ came to proclaim pardon and peace to all; and was himself the substance, of which all the rites of Moses were only types and shadows. View the

^a Prov. viii. 22—30.

^b ver. 1—3. This is confirmed by Phil. ii. 6, 7. Col. i. 16, 17.

types of every description; and there was not one which had not its accomplishment in him: view the prophecies; all of which were fulfilled in him: and at the same time all the curses denounced by the moral law are turned into blessings, to all them who embrace his Gospel. Hence he is justly said to be "*full of grace and truth.*"

But we may not improperly include under these words the *personal* character of Christ. Whilst all his instructions exactly accorded with the mind and will of God, his life was wholly without spot or blemish: he was "full of truth;" and "in him was no sin," "no guile" whatever.

As to the "*grace*" that was in him, listen only to any of his discourses; hear his gracious invitations even to the chief of sinners; see him conversing with publicans and harlots, and allowing them to have the freest access to him; behold him "going about doing good," healing all who came to him, even hundreds and thousands in a day, and proclaiming to all of them the glad tidings of a free and full salvation: and then say whether he was not also *full of grace*, even like an overflowing fountain, "out of whose fulness all that believed on him might receive?"

If we needed any express testimony respecting his character, we have it from those "whose ears heard, whose eyes saw, and whose hands handled this Word of life:" "they beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father:" they beheld it in his miracles ("by which he manifested forth his glory"); they beheld it in his transfiguration; in the audible attestations which he repeatedly received from heaven; in the perfections of wisdom, power, holiness, &c. which he displayed; and finally in his resurrection, and glorious ascension to the right hand of God: they beheld him in all these things, shining as "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person:" veiled as his Godhead was from common eyes, *they* beheld in him a radiance, altogether suited to his august character.]

That we may not entertain these thoughts in a merely speculative manner, we would entreat you to
 "suffer a word of EXHORTATION"—

1. Inquire *wherefore* Christ became incarnate—

[When we hear of such an astonishing event, methinks we should naturally inquire into the reasons of it. Surely there was some *occasion* for it; nay, we cannot conceive that it should take place without some urgent necessity. What then was that necessity? It was *this*. The whole human race were become guilty before God, and were no more able to restore themselves to the Divine favour than the fallen angels were.

Is any one disposed to doubt this truth? let him tell us then, *why* God's co-equal, co-eternal Son became incarnate. In vain will he seek for a reason, except (where St. Paul found it) in the lost state of man: "If one died for all, then were all dead" — — — Know ye then, beloved, every one of you, that you are, in yourselves, lost and hell-deserving sinners; and that, if ever you be saved at all, it must be by the blood and righteousness of your incarnate God — — —]

2. Endeavour to obtain clearer views of his character—

[Though there are days expressly set apart for the consideration of the most important things relating to Christ, his formation in the womb, his nativity, his circumcision, his death, his resurrection, and ascension, yet few, very few, are in the habit of directing their attention to him. Instead of "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him," they scarcely think of him at all, or desire to receive any instruction respecting him. Hence that supineness which we behold on every side — — — But how different would be the state of men, if they once saw his glory, and had just views of his "grace and truth!" What "a gathering of the people to him" would there then be! How would they "flock to him as the doves to their windows!" — — — O that God would take the veil from our hearts — — — And that we might so "behold his glory, as to be changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God!"]

3. Seek after a closer union with him—

[We may all be said to be united with him in some respect, because "we are partakers of flesh and blood, and he likewise has taken part of the same. But it is not his union with our nature that will save us, but our union with him; not his being one *flesh* with us, but our being "one *spirit* with him." We must exercise faith on him; and by means of that faith be united to him as branches to the vine, or as members to the head — — — Without this, we can never hope to receive out of his fulness those blessings which we stand in need of — — — Let none of you then imagine that you have any interest in his salvation, till you are brought daily to live a life of faith upon him, and, through the influences of his Spirit, to devote yourselves unreservedly to his service.]

4. Aspire after that which was the great end of his coming—

[We are constantly reminded that he came into the world, that they who believe in him might become sons of God, and

enjoy everlasting life* — — Shall we then be indifferent about that which brought him down from heaven? How shall we bear the sight of him in the day of judgment, when we shall behold him in the very same body which he assumed on earth? How will that stupendous effort of his love reproach and confound us! How shall we even wish that we had been permitted to perish like the fallen angels, instead of being left to contract that more aggravated guilt of sinning against a God in our own nature, and rejecting the salvation which he died to purchase for us! If we could suppose the Saviour now capable of weeping, as once he did over the impenitent Jerusalem, methinks he must be now weeping over many of us, to see how his love has been disregarded by us, and that the only effect of it is to aggravate our condemnation. Let us awake from this fatal stupor; let us follow him in our hearts to those realms of glory where he now dwells; and strive incessantly for the attainment of that kingdom, where we shall be with him and like him for ever.]

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

MDXCIX.

THE BELIEVER'S INTEREST IN CHRIST'S FULNESS.

John i. 16. *Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*

THE sacred writers never seem to be afraid lest they should exalt Christ too much, or ascribe to him a glory which did not properly belong to him. St. John in particular evinces a desire to magnify him as much as possible, and sets forth his perfect equality with the Father in as strong and perspicuous terms as language would afford. In the chapter before us he declares that Christ was not only co-existent with God before the world, but that he himself was God, the sole Creator of the universe; and in the words we have just read, he represents him as the only source of all good*.

That we also may be led to glorify his name, we shall shew,

I. What is that fulness spoken of in the text—

* If ver. 15. be considered as in a parenthesis, the connexion between ver. 14. and 16. will be clear and manifest.

Jesus Christ has in himself all the fulness of the Godhead^b. But this cannot be the fulness of which the Apostle speaks, because the Godhead is absolutely incommunicable to the creature. There is another fulness, which, according to the Father's appointment, dwells in him as our Mediator^c, namely, a fulness of every thing which his redeemed people can stand in need of—

[Are we immersed in darkness, and sitting in the shadow of death? He is "the light of the world; and whosoever followeth him shall not abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life^d." Are we inexpressibly guilty, and incapable of working out a righteousness for ourselves? He is "Jehovah our Righteousness^e," and "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^f."—Are we so depraved as to be "altogether filthy and abominable," and "insufficient of ourselves even to think a good thought?" He has within himself a fountain of grace to "cleanse us from our filthiness," and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works^g. Are we exposed to severe afflictions and manifold temptations? In him is boundless compassion to sympathize with us, and irresistible power to succour and support us^h. Thus has he in himself a fulness of *light* to instruct, of *merit* to justify, of *grace* to renew, of *compassion* to pity, and of *power* to save us, even "to the very uttermost" of all our wantsⁱ.]

This fulness, however, is not the same with that which resides in his believing people—

[There is a fulness with which believers are filled, even "all the fulness of God^k." But theirs is widely different from his. *Theirs* is *limited*, being only "according to the measure of the gift of Christ^l;" but *his* is *unbounded*; "the Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him;" "he has the residue of the Spirit," dwelling and abiding in him^m. *Theirs* moreover is *derived* from him as its proper source and fountain; but *his* is *essentially inherent* in him: "in him was life" originally: "as the Father has life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in himselfⁿ." *Theirs* is *for themselves alone*; they have not any to communicate to others^o: *His* is *for the use and benefit of his Church*: he possesses it,

^b Col. ii. 9.^c Col. i. 19.^d John viii. 12.^e Jer. xxiii. 6.^f Rom. x. 4.^g Zech. xiii. 1. Tit. ii. 14.^h Heb. iv. 15. and ii. 18.ⁱ Heb. vii. 25.^k Eph. iii. 19.^l Eph. iv. 7.^m John iii. 34. Mal. ii. 15.ⁿ John i. 4. and v. 26.^o Matt. xxv. 9.

that, being Head over all, he may impart out of it, and "fill all things with it^p." *Theirs* is *perishable*: though they be filled with it now, even as a house with light from the meridian sun, they would be destitute of it in an instant, if the communications of heaven were intercepted or withheld: but *his* is immutable and *eternal*: he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^q."]]

That our inquiries about this fulness are not merely speculative, will appear, while we shew,

II. What interest believers have in it—

Every believer receives out of the fulness that is in Christ—

[To state the precise mode in which Jesus communicates his blessings to the soul, is impossible; nor while we remain strangers to so many things in nature, must we wonder, if there be some things in the dispensations of Grace which we cannot fully comprehend^r. But the illustrations, with which the Scripture furnishes us, are sufficiently clear for any purposes of useful instruction. Christ is represented as a vine, of which we are the branches; and as a Head, to which we are united as the members. Now, as between these a vital union and constant communication are necessary, in order to the support of animal or vegetative life; so is it by constant, though invisible, supplies of grace from Christ that the believer is enabled to maintain his spiritual life and vigour^s.—]

He receives from Christ "grace for grace"—

[The terms "grace for grace" are variously interpreted; nor is it easy to ascertain which of the different senses is the true one. Some explain it of "the *substantial* grace of the Gospel," which all, both Jews and Gentiles, receive; "instead of the *shadowy* grace that was contained in the legal dispensation:" others understand it as importing "grace upon grace," administered in copious and successive portions: others again think it means, "grace answerable to the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" and others, "grace for grace sake." Without determining which of these interpretations we should exclusively retain, we may observe, in reference to them all, that all those blessings which believers under the law enjoyed by means of types and ceremonies, we have conveyed to us in a fuller measure, and by the more simple channel of the written word: "Christ came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly^t." Nor is there any intermission to the communications

^p Eph. i. 22, 23. and iv. 10.

^q Heb. xiii. 8.

^r John iii. 8

^s John xv. 5. Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^t John x. 10.

which we receive from Christ; they flow, like the waves of the sea, in constant succession and the richest abundance: whatever we have received, it will always be found true, that "he giveth more grace". His aim in bestowing on us such "abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness," is, that he may transform us into his own likeness. And this is the effect which he produces: as a parent begets a child in his own likeness, or a seal stamps its own image on the wax impressed by it, so does the Lord Jesus communicate to us the very graces that there are in him, till we are "changed into his image from glory to glory". All this he does purely "of his own good pleasure," and for the honour of his Father's name. He sees not any thing in us which can merit such unspeakable favours; "he is gracious because he will be gracious, and has compassion because he will have compassion". Nor must we forget that this is the privilege of "all:" the Apostles themselves could draw from no other fountain; and it is alike open to all who will go to it*.]

INFER—

1. How glorious is Christ in himself, and how suited to our necessities!

[We admire the sun in the firmament because it pours out its blessings upon so many at once: but *that* can enlighten only half the globe at one time. Not so the glorious Person of whose fulness we speak: if every person in the whole creation should call upon him at the same moment, he would have no occasion to defer an answer to the request of any; he is all eye to see, all ear to hear, all hand to relieve; in the very same instant he could replenish all, out of his own inexhaustible, undiminished fulness. Who then can hesitate a moment to pronounce him "God over all, blessed for ever?" And is not this exactly such a Saviour as we need? Are not we all emptiness and poverty, all weakness and misery? Is that description exaggerated which represents us as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" Let us adore our God for giving us *such* a Saviour: and let us "live continually by faith on the Son of God," making him our "wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."]

2. How highly privileged are all true believers!

[The believer may survey all the fulness that there is in Christ, and claim it all as his own. All which Christ possesses

* Jam. iv. 6. x 2 Cor. iii. 18. y Rom. ix. 15, 16.

* John vii. 37. * Rev. iii. 17.

in himself, all which he can do on earth, and all which he can bestow in heaven, is the portion of every the weakest saint, according to the measure of the grace that is in him, and according to the capacity which he has for receiving more grace. Every vessel of the sanctuary, from "the smallest cups to the largest flagons," shall be filled^b: if any be straitened in the blessings they receive, they are "straitened in themselves, and not in him^c." Blessed, thrice blessed are all that "hang upon him!" But can the text be applied to all this assembly? Can we say respecting you, without exception, "Out of his fulness have *we* all received?" Would to God we could! Would to God that the graces, which were in Christ, were so conspicuous in you all, and were poured out upon you in such an abundant measure, that there might be no room to doubt of your union with him! But let this matter be no longer in suspense: let us all go to the Fountain-head, and "draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation^d:" let us "aspire after the blessedness of God's chosen, that we may rejoice for ever in the gladness of his nation, and glory with his inheritance^e."]

^b Isai. xxii. 24.^c 2 Cor. vi. 12.^d Isai. xii. 3.^e Ps. cvi. 5.

MDC.

THE MANIFESTATION WHICH CHRIST HAS GIVEN OF THE FATHER.

John i. 18. *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

THE knowledge of God is the great source of blessings to mankind, but the heathen world were altogether ignorant of him, nor were the Jews themselves fully instructed concerning him: to make a full revelation of him to the world was a part of that work which was reserved for Christ himself; and this office he performed, to the unspeakable comfort of his Church and people. The Evangelist unites his testimony with that of John the Baptist in confirmation of this truth.

We shall inquire,

I. What Christ has declared of the Father—

God himself is invisible to the eye of sense^a: even Moses was permitted to see only his back parts^b. But Christ had a peculiar relation to the Father as “his only-begotten Son;” and a most intimate acquaintance with him, as being from all eternity, and at that very hour, “in his bosom.” He has made known the Father to us, and declared,

1. His nature—

[Mankind had gross conceptions of the Deity as a material Being: but Christ has assured us of his perfect *Spirituality*^c. Nor was the *Unity* of God clearly ascertained among the Gentiles: but Christ has left no room for doubt upon this subject^d. He has, moreover, revealed to us a *Trinity* of persons in the Godhead. He has affirmed in the plainest terms his own Oneness with the Father^e. He has spoken of the Holy Ghost as co-existing with himself and with the Father^f, and has joined the Three together as equal in authority and honour^g. Thus has he enabled us by faith to “see him who is invisible.”]

2. His perfections—

[God had long since proclaimed his own name to Moses^h; but Christ has afforded us more abundant discoveries of all his attributes. He has clearly shewn us that his goodness is unboundedⁱ, his sovereignty uncontrolled^k, his power irresistible^l, his justice inflexible^m, his mercy infiniteⁿ, and his truth inviolable^o. There is not any thing relating to his Father, the knowledge of which could be at all serviceable to us, that he has not revealed^p.]

He did not however merely utter these things like the prophets of old:

II. How he declared him—

Christ had formerly spoken of God in and by the prophets^q; but now he declared the Father in a different manner:

1. By exhibiting a perfect pattern of him—

[He was himself an exact resemblance of the Father^r, and in his conduct exhibited every perfection of the Deity^s.

^a 1 Tim. vi. 16.

^d Mark xii. 29.

^e Matt. xxviii. 19.

^k Matt. xi. 25, 26.

ⁿ John iii. 16, 17.

^q 1 Pet. i. 11.

^b Exod. xxxiii. 23.

^c John x. 30.

^h Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^l Matt. xxvi. 53.

^o Luke xvi. 17.

^r Heb. i. 3.

^f John iv. 24.

^g John xv. 26.

ⁱ Matt. v. 45.

^m Matt. xxvi. 42.

^p John xv. 15.

^s John viii. 29.

Hence a sight of him was, in fact, a sight of the Father himself[†].]

2. By making known his counsels—

[Much of the Father's counsels had lain hid from the foundation of the world, or had been very imperfectly revealed. Christ opened them to his hearers as they were able to bear them[‡]. He made known God's intention to admit the Gentiles into his Church[‡], and assured us that the most abandoned of mankind should be cordially received the very instant he returned to God[‡]; but that none of whatever character could be saved, unless they sought acceptance with God through his mediation[‡]. Thus by these declarations he has enabled us to attain a more perfect knowledge of the Father's mind and will.]

3. By exerting a secret energy on the minds of men—

[No man could know the Father unless Christ revealed him inwardly by his Spirit, as well as outwardly by the word[‡]. His very Disciples understood not until he opened their eyes[‡]: nor can we attain to a true knowledge of God in any other way. The "word must come to us in power and in the Holy Ghost," or it will come in vain[‡]; but, when applied by his Spirit, it shall teach us plainly of the Father[‡].]

INFER—

1. How glorious a person must Christ be!

[The description given of him shews his superiority above every created being: He is not the Son of God by creation, as the angels are, nor by regeneration and adoption, as men; but by an inexplicable generation, his "*Only-begotten*;" and, as well in his incarnate as in his pre-existent state, was continually "in the bosom of the Father[‡]." Nor was any other worthy to reveal the Father to us. Let us then entertain just conceptions of his worth and dignity, and manifest our delight in him as the saints in heaven do[†].]

2. How precious ought the Scriptures to be to us!

[Job and David had but a small portion of the Scriptures in their hands: yet did they value them above every thing in the world[‡]. How much more should we, who possess the

[†] John xiv. 7—9.

[‡] Luke xv. 20.

[‡] Luke xxiv. 45.

[‡] John iii. 13.

[‡] Job xxiii. 12. Ps. cxix. 72.

[‡] John xvi. 12.

[‡] John xiv. 6.

[‡] 1 Thess. i. 5.

[‡] Rev. v. 5—9.

[‡] Matt. viii. 11, 12.

[‡] Matt. xi. 27.

[‡] John xvi. 26.

sacred oracles entire! In these is recorded every thing that Christ has declared; and by these we may be made wise unto salvation^a. Let us then search them with diligence, and treasure them up in our hearts; nor let a day pass without our digging into those invaluable mines¹.]

3. How inexcusable are they who are ignorant of God!

[It is to our shame that many of us are still ignorant of God^k; we have not that knowledge of him that produces correspondent affections towards him. But what excuse can we offer in extenuation of our guilt? Has not Christ declared the Father in order that we might know him? And is he not willing also to reveal him in us by his powerful energy on our souls? Some, doubtless, are more guilty than others in proportion as they have possessed means of instruction; but all will find the consequences of their ignorance most tremendous^l. Let all begin then to inquire after God with their whole hearts, nor rest till they have attained that knowledge of him which is life eternal^m.]

^a 2 Tim. iii. 15.

¹ Prov. ii. 4.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 34.

^l 2 Thess. 1. 8.

^m John xvii. 3.

MDCI.

CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD.

John i. 29. *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

IN the general estimation of the world, they are reputed great who bear sway over their fellow-creatures, and are surrounded with pomp and splendour. But, with God, men are accounted great according as they possess a knowledge of his ways, and advance the ends of his government. Hence we are told by our Lord himself that John the Baptist, a plain rustic man, clothed with coarse raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle, and subsisting on the spontaneous produce of the wilderness, was the greatest of all men that had ever been born. And what was it that so exalted him, not only above all the monarchs of the mightiest empires, but above Abraham, or Moses, or David, or any other of the prophets? It was *this*:

they had seen Christ only at a distance, and spoken of him only in dark prophecies; but *he* beheld him personally; and, having discovered him by an infallible sign from heaven, pointed him out to others as that very Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world. Through the goodness of God, we may be as much exalted above him, as he was above others, if we behold Jesus in the character which is here assigned him; because the completion of his sacrificial work, together with the more perfect revelation of it, which we have in the New Testament, enables us to enter far more deeply into the mystery of redemption, and more fully to comply with the ends and designs of God in it*. To forward therefore your truest advancement, we shall,

I. Illustrate the character of our Lord as it is here described—

[Under the law there were lambs offered every morning and evening in sacrifice to God; and it is to these, and not to the Paschal Lamb, that St. John refers. They were to be of the first year, and without blemish^b: and by the continual offering up of them God was pacified, as it were, so that his wrath did not break forth to destroy his people on account of their daily transgressions. Such a lamb was Christ: he was *the* Lamb, whom all the others typified. He was truly without spot or blemish^c; and was offered on the altar of his cross, not merely *for the good*, but *in the stead*, of sinners^d. He was really a propitiatory sacrifice, inasmuch as he bore in his own body the curse due to sin^e, and expiated all its guilt. As there was no variation of the daily sacrifices, but only a repetition of the same, so his one offering of himself is the sole cause of our acceptance with God: nor need that to be repeated, because the virtue of it extends from the beginning to the end of time; “he is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world^f.” Nor is it the sin of one nation only that he takes away, but the sin of the whole world^g. He was eminently the Lamb of *God*, having been chosen to that office by God, and being accepted by him on our behalf in the discharge of it: He was “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour^h.”]

* Matt. xi. 11.

* 1 Pet. i. 19.

* 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^h Eph. v. 2.

^b Exod. xxix. 38—41. Numb. xxviii. 3—8.

^d 1 Pet. iii. 18. Gal. iii. 13.

^f Rev. xiii. 8.

^g 1 John ii. 2.

II. Call more particularly your attention to him—

1. Let the careless sinner “behold” him—

[It is but too evident that they, who live in the neglect of God and their own souls, know little of the evil and malignity of sin. But let such persons view the Son of God leaving the bosom of his Father, and assuming our nature to atone for sin: let them go to Gethsemane and behold him bathed in a bloody sweat through the agonies of his soul: let them follow him to Calvary, and hear him crying in the depths of dereliction, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” Let them view him expiring under the curse and condemnation of the law; and then let them judge, whether sin be so light and venial an evil as they imagine? Let them bethink themselves, “if such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” Let them behold him whom they have pierced, yea, whom they are daily crucifying afresh, and mourn^k. Let them know that what he suffered was for them; and that, if they be only willing to humble themselves for their iniquities, the benefits of his death shall extend to them. O that we might all so behold him, as to experience the efficacy of his blood in the removal of our sins!]

2. Let the self-righteous moralist “behold” him—

[How strange is it that any one, who bears the name of Christ, should expect salvation by the works of the law! Why should that Lamb of God have come down from heaven to expiate our guilt, if sin could have been taken away by means of any repentance or righteousness of ours? What truth could there be in the Baptist’s assertion, if pardon were to be obtained in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ? Yea, for what end could so many thousands of lambs have bled upon the altar, but to shew, that “without shedding of blood there could be no remission^l,” and consequently, to lead the attention of all to that Lamb of God, that should in due time be offered on the cross? Let such indignity then be no longer shewn to the Saviour of the world: but, as it is his office to take away our sin, let us renounce all self-righteous hopes, and trust entirely in his all-atoning sacrifice.]

3. Let the mourning penitent “behold” him—

[No sight under heaven can be so welcome to a contrite soul as a sight of Jesus dying in the place of sinners: for, can we suppose, that he was appointed of God to make atonement for us, and that he executed his commission by dying on the cross, and that, after all, he is unable or unwilling to take away our sin? Was he designed to be a “propitiation for the sins

^l Luke xxiii. 31.

^k Zech. xii. 10.

^l Heb. ix. 22.

of the whole world," and is there such malignity in the sins of any individual, that there is not a sufficiency in his blood to atone for them? Let us put away such disparaging thoughts of this Lamb of God: let us view him as infinite both in power and grace: let us listen to his encouraging invitation, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth^m:" and let us, whatever be our state, trust in him, as "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."]

4. Let the professor of godliness "behold" him—

[Well may you rejoice in the sufficiency of your Saviour's merits; well may you glory in the security which his blood affords you. But remember, it is not the guilt of sin only that he removes, but the power of it also: and the experience of the latter is our only evidence that we have experienced the former. "To redeem us from the love and practice of iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works," was no less the intent of his death, than to deliver us from condemnationⁿ." While therefore we behold the Lamb of God as the ground of our hope, let us also behold him as a pattern for our imitation^o. Let us follow his steps in all meekness and patience, in all purity and holiness: and let us convince the world that faith in Christ, so far from relaxing our zeal for good works, is the strongest incentive to the performance of them.]

^m Isai. xlv. 22. ⁿ Tit. ii. 14. 1 Pet. ii. 24.
^o 1 Pet. ii. 21.

MDCII.

SIGHT OF JESUS, A SOURCE OF JOY.

John i. 45. *Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*

A GENERAL expectation of the Messiah prevailed in Israel at the time of our Saviour's advent: and when his forerunner, John the Baptist, was sent, very wonderful were the effects produced by his ministry. Though he did no miracle, yet he excited the attention of the whole Jewish nation. The sanctity of his character, and the power of his words, soon gained him the name of a prophet: and, as there had been no prophet in Israel for the space of

about four hundred years, his labours were hailed as a return of God's love to his people; and persons of all ranks and orders flocked to him, and submitted to his baptism. Many began to suppose that he was the Messiah himself. *That*, however, he disclaimed: but he avowed himself to be the person spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah eight hundred years before, as sent of God to make known the Messiah, who was already come. Accordingly, he pointed out the Lord Jesus Christ to them, as "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world^a." This testimony of his, supported by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord Jesus at his baptism, gained credit with some. We do not read that Jesus had yet awhile wrought any miracle: but there was in his appearance what seemed amply sufficient to justify John's testimony respecting him; and those who were introduced to the knowledge of him were very desirous to impart to others the benefit they had received. The first to whom the discovery of the Messiah was made, was Andrew; and he immediately communicated the glad tidings to his brother Peter. The next to whom Jesus made himself known was Philip: and he also, like Andrew, sought some friend to whom to impart this joyful intelligence; and, on finding Nathanael, endeavoured to make him a partaker of his joy, saying, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

That you, also, may be partakers of the same joy, I will shew,

I. How amply the Lord Jesus Christ is described in the writings of the Old Testament—

We may notice it,

1. More generally in the writings of Moses—

[At the very beginning of the world, even whilst man was yet in Paradise, Moses informs, that the Messiah was foretold, as "the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head," and deliver men, though not without grievous sufferings

^a ver. 29.

to himself, from the fatal effects of Adam's transgression^b. He, at a period far distant from that, announces the Saviour as a descendant of Abraham; and as one "in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed^c". Afterwards, he comes more fully to declare both the time of his advent, and the character he should sustain. He informs us that this Almighty Shiloh should come into the world before the power vested in the tribe of Judah should have departed from it. All the other scribes should long since have been reduced to a dependence on foreigners: but Judah's dominion should remain, and not be utterly destroyed, till the Messiah should have appeared in the world^d. Moreover, he should come as a prophet; as "a prophet like unto Moses^e;" uniting in himself the offices of a Legislator, an Instructor, a Mediator, a Governor, a Saviour.

Thus fully did Moses speak of him, independently of all the types which most accurately and minutely delineated the whole of his work and office.]

2. More particularly, in the writings of the prophets—

[Nothing can be conceived more ample or minute than the descriptions given of the Messiah in the prophetic writings. *The family from which he should spring* was restricted to that of David^f. Yet he should not be *born in a way* of natural generation, but of a pure Virgin^g. *The place of his birth* was distinctly foretold: it should be Bethlehem: and not the Bethlehem in the land of Naphtali, but Bethlehem Ephratah in the land of Judah^h. *The time* also was fixed; for he must come whilst the second temple was yet standingⁱ. In *his appearance*, however, he should be so *mean*, that it should raise many doubts amongst his followers, and prove a stumbling-block to many: he should be "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he should have no form nor comeliness in the eyes of those who beheld him, nor any beauty for which he should be desired^k." In consequence of his having none of the attractions of carnal men, *he should be despised and rejected of men*; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: men should hide their faces from him, as one despised and held in no esteem^l. *The end of his coming* was also very fully declared: he should come to "bear the sins of many," "to be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was to be upon him; and by his stripes we were to be healed^m." *The mode in which he should conduct*

^b Gen. iii. 15.

^c Gen. xii. 3. and xxii. 18.

^d Gen. xlix. 10.

^e Deut. xviii. 18.

^f Ps. cxxxii. 11. Acts ii. 30. Isai. xi. 1.

^g Isai. vii. 14.

^h Mic. v. 2.

ⁱ Mal. iii. 1.

^k Isai. lffi. 2.

^l Isai. liii. 3.

^m Isai. liii. 5, 6.

himself under all these trials, was also made known: "He should be led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so should he not so much as open his mouth". The manner in which he should be put to death was to be by crucifixion^o; though that was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment. And yet he should be exempted from that which was a customary attendant on it—the breaking of his legs: for, though pierced in his hands, his feet, his side, "not a bone of him was to be broken". Time would fail me to speak of the incidents which were foretold relative to his treatment whilst yet upon the cross, the insults they offered him^a, the giving him vinegar to drink^r, the casting lots on his vesture^s, their putting him to death between two malefactors^t; or the mode of his interment in the tomb of a rich man, though in his death he was numbered with the most abject of the human race^u:—I will pass over these things, and only mention his resurrection, with the precise time it should take place, even the third day, before his body should have seen corruption^v; and his ascension, also, to the highest heavens^w; and his sending down of the Holy Spirit, to testify of him, and to qualify his Disciples for the work of propagating his Gospel, and establishing his kingdom in the world^x. Let all these things be considered; and you will say, there was such a body of evidence relating to the Messiahship of Jesus, as, in any considerate mind, must preclude a possibility of doubt.]

The joy expressed at the finding of Jesus will lead me to shew,

II. What an acquisition He is to all who can truly say, "We have found him—"

A distant prospect of him, from the remotest ages, had been a ground of very exalted joy—

[We cannot doubt but that our first parents rejoiced much in the promise given them relative to "the seed of the woman;" and that Abel also felt rich consolation in his soul, whilst offering up a firstling of his flock, in token of his dependence on him. But in the case of Abraham we are not left to conjecture: we know infallibly, that he did foresee the day of Christ; and that, in the prospect of it, he greatly rejoiced^a. Indeed the designation given him by the prophet, as "the Desire of all Nations^b," clearly shews in what light he was regarded by those who had any insight into his proper character.]

^a Isai. liii. 7.

^q Ps. xxii. 7.

^t Isai. liii. 12.

^v Ps. lxviii. 18.

^b Hagg. ii. 7.

^o Zech. xii. 10.

^r Ps. lxix. 21.

^u Isai. liii. 9.

^s Joel ii. 28, 29.

^p Exod. xii. 46.

^x Ps. xxii. 18.

^x Ps. xvi. 10.

^a John viii. 56.

At the time of his advent, and during his sojourning on earth, the discovery of him was deemed a subject of self-congratulation—

[As announced by the angelic choir to the shepherds, we behold him in this view: "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord^c." And how his Virgin Mother gloried in him, you well know: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour^d." In truth, all who waited for his coming, looked for him as "the Consolation of Israel^e." The delight expressed by Andrew and Philip, on their introduction to him, has been already noticed: and we cannot doubt but that all his Apostles, who so willingly left their all to follow him, found in him an ample compensation for all that they had lost^f. In truth, the experience of Zaccheus must have pervaded multitudes, whilst they listened to his words of grace, and felt, in their bodies and in their souls, the mighty working of his power^g —]

The joy of his servants, after the publication of his Gospel, was yet greater, in proportion to the clearer discoveries which they had of his transcendent excellence—

[Behold the thousands on the day of Pentecost! What a change was wrought on *them* by the revelation of Christ to their souls! In the morning, their hearts were as full of all malignity as that of Satan himself: in the evening, you find them "eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God^h." The people of Samaria, the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Jailor and his family, all, as soon as they heard of him, found the sure accompaniment of faith in himⁱ. And what shall I say of the Apostle Paul? No man ever had so much of his own to glory in as he: yet did he account it all but loss for Christ; yea, he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord^k."]

And is there any difference in the experience of his servants at this day?

[None at all. I will appeal to all who know him. I will ask, Whether, in their estimation, he do not fully answer to "the treasure hid in a field;" and to "the pearl of great

^c Luke ii. 10, 11.

^d Luke i. 46, 47.

^e Luke ii. 25.

^f Mark x. 28, 29.

^g Luke xix. 5, 6.

^h Acts ii. 41, 46.

ⁱ Acts viii. 8, 39. and xvi. 34.

^k Phil. iii. 4—8.

price," which every one who finds, will sell all that he has to purchase¹? What, though we behold him not with our bodily eyes, is our joy the less on that account? No: for "though we see him not, we love him: yea, though now we see him not, yet, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving even now the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls^m."]

In conclusion, I would beg to ask two QUESTIONS:

1. Have you attained this happiness yourselves?

[The Lord Jesus Christ has been fully made known among you, and "has even been set forth, as it were, crucified before your eyesⁿ." Observe on what slight evidence of his Messiahship his first Disciples rejoiced. Neither he, nor John his Forerunner, had wrought any miracle: yet, because the Holy Ghost had descended in a visible shape upon him at his baptism, both John and others believed on him. They, moreover, could have but very indistinct views of his character; and yet they rejoiced in him. How strong, then, should be your faith, and how exalted your joy, now that you have a full discovery of his glory; a discovery, which not even the angels in heaven enjoyed, till it was given to them through the medium of the Christian Church^o! Surely you have cause to be ashamed, if, amidst all your privileges, you remain ignorant of the Saviour's love, or strangers to the salvation which he has obtained for you.]

2. Are you endeavouring to impart it to others?

[You find not any in the days of old, who, having found the Saviour themselves, did not endeavour to make him known to others. It is indeed impossible to feel our need of him, and to be experimentally acquainted with the blessedness of his salvation, and not to labour, according to our ability, to make others partakers of our joy. I know full well, that a zeal for his glory, and for the salvation of our fellow-men, will entail upon us a considerable measure of reproach, as enthusiastic, and "righteous overmuch." But why should we regard such a contemptible imputation as that? It is remarkable, that Philip was under a mistake, when he announced Jesus as "of Nazareth;" for he was not of Nazareth, but of Bethlehem. Yet because Philip supposed him to be of Nazareth, where he was not born, but had only sojourned, he willingly proclaimed his Master as of *that place*, notwithstanding the obloquy universally attached to it^p. So let us never be ashamed of Christ, because of the odium that attaches to a profession of his name. We should not indeed, by ignorance

¹ Matt. xiii. 44—46.

^o Eph. iii. 10.

^m 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

^p ver. 46.

ⁿ Gal. iii. 1.

and inadvertence, put a stumbling-block in the way of any: but, if despised for the sake of Christ, we should welcome the shame, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it. No consideration whatever should intimidate us: but, having found "Christ precious to our own souls," we should "confess him openly before all," and commend him to all around us, as "all our salvation, and all our desire."]

MDCHL.

EVIL, AND CURE, OF PREJUDICE.

John i. 46. *Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.*

KNOWLEDGE is not given to any man for himself alone. As "a light is not put under a bed or under a bushel, but is set on a candlestick, that it may give light to those who are in the house;" so knowledge is imparted by God, in order that it may be rendered subservient to the good of those who are in intellectual or spiritual darkness. The example of those who were first called to attend upon our Lord is worthy of imitation in this respect. Andrew, having been directed to Christ by John the Baptist, and having been convinced, by personal intercourse with Jesus, that he was indeed the Messiah, "he finds his own brother Simon, and says to him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus^a." The next day, Philip, who was of the same city as Andrew and Peter, was called to follow Christ: and "he, also, finding Nathanael, said to him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph^b." In the mind of Nathanael, however, there existed a prejudice against Nazareth, as being the last place from whence a person of so exalted a character would ever proceed: and therefore he asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is generally supposed that this prejudice was called forth by Philip speaking of Jesus as belonging to Nazareth; when it

^a ver. 36—42.

^b ver. 43—45.

was known that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem^c. But, had that been the case, I conceive that the answer would rather have been, “Can *the Messiah* come out of Nazareth?” and not, “Can *any good thing* come out of Nazareth?” For, though Bethlehem was to give birth to the Messiah, it was not the only city from whence *any* good could proceed. I rather imagine, therefore, that it was to the general bad character of Nazareth that Nathanael referred; intimating, that, so far from giving birth to the Messiah, it was scarcely possible that any good whatever should proceed from it. This prejudice was not altogether without foundation; for Nazareth was deservedly infamous even in Galilee, the whole province of which was considered as less honourable than any other part of Judæa^d. The conduct of the Nazarenes, both at the first opening of our Lord’s ministry there^e, and on a subsequent occasion^f, clearly shewed, that they were a blind and wicked people. Yet that was no reason why *nothing* good should come forth from thence. And, if this prejudice had not been corrected, it might have terminated in a continued ignorance of Christ, and a consequent lost of his salvation.

Let me then, from this history, shew you,

I. The evil of prejudice—

Prejudice is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man: and it is productive of most injurious effects,

1. To those who are the objects of it—

[Prejudice has always *some* ground. It may indeed be founded on error, as well as on truth: but the very existence of it supposes that the person exercising it beholds, in his own opinion at least, something blame-worthy in him who is the object of it: and it usually operates most forcibly in those who have taken the least pains to ascertain the truth. Nicodemus no sooner heard of the Lord Jesus as belonging to Nazareth, than he concluded, from that very circumstance, that he could not be the true Messiah: and he even *appealed* to Philip, whether *any* good thing *could* come out of Nazareth; insinuating, that on so plain a point, there could not be any reasonable

^c Matt. ii. 4—6.

^e Luke iv. 22, 23, 28—30.

^d John vii. 52.

^f Matt. xiii. 54—56.

doubt: "*Can* any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Now here was extreme injustice done to the people of that city: for though the majority of them might be worthless, there might be some as estimable characters as any in Israel. But it is in this way that prejudice condemns both things and persons in the mass. Nations will entertain these very notions respecting each other; so that the belonging to a rival nation shall be sufficient to make a person our enemy, though we are utter strangers to his character. The same malignant principle operates also very strongly between different societies belonging to the same nation. As, in Catholic countries, rival orders of men hate each other; so even in this Protestant land, where greater liberality might be expected to prevail, churchmen and dissenters are ready to question whether almost any measure of truth or piety be in the party to which they are opposed. It is scarcely necessary to say how strongly this unhallowed disposition prevails against individuals. A man may have embraced sentiments which are deemed strict and precise; and may, in conformity to them, be living a more holy, mortified, and self-denying life than others around him; and this shall be quite sufficient to render him odious and contemptible to all around him. From that moment, every one shall feel himself at liberty to speak evil of him; and nobody shall dare to defend him. All he says, and all he does, shall be an occasion of offence. John Baptist, because he was of secluded and mortified habits, was said "to have a devil:" and our blessed Lord, because he was of more "easy and social habits," was called "a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber." And so, if we be truly religious, it will be done to us: whether we "pipe or mourn," we shall find no sympathy, but be alike objects of condemnation; every thing being viewed through the medium of prejudice, and therefore deemed extravagant and absurd. Every one who will follow the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity shall surely find that he has this cross to bear: he shall be despised, and hated, and "have all manner of evil spoken against him falsely, for Christ's sake. In truth, the real Christian does not live under the same laws as others; nor must he expect that measure of protection that is accorded to other men. He may be traduced, insulted, injured by all: and no one will take his part: whilst, if he were to act, in one single instance, towards others, as every one feels at liberty to act towards him, the mouths of all would be opened against him, and a fire would be kindled which would not readily be extinguished: so true is that saying of the prophet Isaiah, "He that departeth from evil, maketh himself a prey."]

2. To those who indulge it—

[Prejudice blinds the mind to truth, and utterly indisposes

us for the reception of it. A person under its influence can see no good in him whom it condemns, and will listen to nothing that shall tend to the vindication of his character. We have a remarkable illustration of this, in the conduct of the people of Ephesus. When they perceived that the preaching of the Apostle Paul was likely to lessen the veneration of many for the goddess whom they worshipped, they set the whole city in an uproar: and when a person, named Alexander, stood forth to vindicate him, the people, as soon as they saw that he was a Jew, instead of listening to a single word that he had to say, all, for the space of about two hours, cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Thus they shut out all means of conviction, and kindled in their own breasts the keenest resentments against those who sought only to make known unto them the way of life and salvation. In the common affairs of life, men act not thus. Our blessed Lord placed this matter in its true light, in answer to those who in the same perverse way rejected him: "When ye see a cloud rising in the west, ye say there will be rain, and it comes to pass. And when the south wind blows, ye say there will be heat: and it is so. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the earth, and of the heavens; and how is it that ye discern not this time?" The truth is, that if prejudice once blind the eyes, nothing whatever will suffice to remove it: and men will rather ascribe the miracles of our Lord to Satanic influence, than acknowledge the plain and obvious inference that should be deduced from them. Thus, whilst this hateful disposition vents itself against the most deserving objects, it inflicts the deadliest wound on him who indulges it; inasmuch as it calls forth into activity all his basest passions, and shuts up his soul in impenetrable darkness.

Happily for Nathanael, he had a friend, who, if not able to satisfy all his doubts, was capable of giving him such advice, as, if duly followed, would issue in the removal of them.]

In this advice of Philip we shall see,

II. The remedy of it—

Inquiry is the obvious remedy to be applied, in all cases. To all then, who are under the influence of prejudice, I would say, "Come and see."

1. To the profane Atheist—

[I will grant that your prejudices are not wholly destitute of some plausible grounds whereon to stand. There are in the world many things which seem calculated to impress the mind with an idea that there is no controlling Providence, to protect

^s Acts xix. 34.

^b Luke xii. 54—57.

the good, and to punish the workers of iniquity. It does appear strange that the ungodly should be permitted so to triumph, and that the righteous should be so exposed to their malignity. But, whilst I grant that these things may prove a stumbling-block to the inconsiderate, I must say, that, on a closer inspection, there will be found such evidence of a Divine agency in the world as will be abundantly sufficient to remove all doubts upon the subject. If we look at the earth, we cannot conceive that it came into existence by a fortuitous concussion of atoms: nor, if we survey the heavenly bodies, and trace them in their various courses, can we imagine, that they are left to themselves, without any one to uphold them in their orbits. If we behold a watch, or any other complicated machine, we never suppose that it made itself, or that it needs not the superintendence of an intelligent agent to regulate its motions. How much less, then, can we contemplate the infinitely diversified objects of the whole creation, all preserved in their order for thousands of years, and not confess a creating power, and a superintending Providence? Only let any man "come and see," and his doubts will vanish, like the mist before the noon-day sun.]

2. To the proud infidel—

[You, too, have specious reasons for disbelieving the Holy Scriptures. There are in the sacred volume many things which you cannot comprehend. But is this a just ground for denying its divine authority? Are there not truths in human sciences which surpass your comprehension? Why, then, may you not expect to find such in a revelation from God? Look at the evidences of our holy religion: see whether the prophecies, so numerous, so minute, so incapable of being accomplished by any collusion or confederacy whatever, do not determine, beyond a possibility of doubt, that they were inspired by an omniscient and Almighty God. Mark the miracles, too, by which the doctrines both of the Old and New Testament were confirmed; and say whether they do not, of necessity, commend themselves as of divine origin. Only "come and see" with a candid mind, and you shall be fully satisfied that the Scriptures are indeed the word of God.]

3, To the self-justifying moralist—

[You persuade yourself, that because we deny to works the office of justifying the soul before God, we discourage the performance of them; and that, consequently, the doctrine which we preach, of salvation by faith alone, cannot be true. But your conclusions are erroneous altogether. If you will but examine for yourselves, you shall find, that no other way of salvation than that which the Gospel has proclaimed is

suiting to fallen man; nor will any other be found worthy of Almighty God. His justice *must* be honoured, as well as his mercy; and it is only by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ that its demands are, or can be, satisfied. And as to the performance of good works, respecting which you are so jealous, look and see whether any person, from the foundation of the world, ever exhibited a brighter pattern of morality than Paul; who yet said, "I desire to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." Only be candid in your examination of this point, and it shall force itself upon your mind with an evidence that is irresistible.]

4. The licentious worldling—

[‘How can that be a source of happiness, which would rob me of all that I have ever delighted in, and constrain me to mortify my flesh; and, after all, would subject me to the contempt and hatred of all my friends?’ This appears to you a difficulty that cannot be removed. But I would say to you also, “Come, and see:” try what religion will really do for you: see whether its ways be not ways of pleasantness and peace: see whether there be not a more refined pleasure arising from self-denial for the Lord’s sake, than in all the self-indulgence that you ever experienced. Come, and see what happiness there is in communion with God, in the testimony of a good conscience, and in a prospect of a blessed immortality. I will venture to affirm, that if you give the experiment a fair trial, you shall find incomparably greater happiness in God than you ever found in the gratifications of sense.]

LEARN then, from this subject, how to act,

1. In reference to your own prejudices—

[Every man living is more or less influenced by this principle. Piety itself will not altogether exempt us from it. Nathanael was “an Israelite indeed;” yet, though “without guile,” he was not without prejudice: and therefore it becomes us all to be open to conviction, and to be willing to have our prejudices removed: we should never decline using the means of information that are open to us; but should be intent only on ascertaining the truth. Whether our prejudice refer to persons or things, we should find a real delight in having our views rectified, and should spare no pains to acquire a more perfect way.

In this point of view, the Bible Society has rendered most important services to the Church of Christ. It has brought together multitudes who were once, through the force of prejudice, alienated from each other; and has diffused among them a principle of mutual love. And if we were to cultivate

more of a friendly spirit with those of the Jewish nation, it is highly probable that our mutual animosities would be soon abated, and that an easier way might be opened for them into the fold of Christ. At all events, on our own part, prejudice should cease; and on every subject, and towards every man, our minds should be unbiassed, and our souls be intent only on rectitude and truth. We should "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good¹."]]

2. In reference to the prejudices of others—

[Be not offended if you see in others the infirmities which you feel in yourselves. Be careful, too, not to irritate or despise those who labour under them: but, with kindness and gentleness, endeavour to guide them to the knowledge of the truth.

In this respect, as in all others, our blessed Lord must be our example: "Learn of me," says he; "for I am meek and lowly in heart;" that is, I can bear with your ignorance, and be content to administer instruction in a way suited to your capacity. Philip's conduct, too, was worthy of imitation: for, though fully convinced himself, he did not begin to argue and dispute with Nathanael, but invited him rather to examine and judge for himself. Thus we also should act: we should adopt such methods of instruction and persuasion as are most likely to remove the veil that is on our brother's heart; and should labour, not so much for the establishment of our own dogmas, as for the best interests of his soul. And, if we find any persons disposed to hold fast their delusions, we should "in meekness instruct them, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth^k."]]

¹ 1 Thess. v. 21.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 25.

MDCIV.

AN ISRAELITE INDEED.

John i. 47. *Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*

IT is comfortable to reflect, that there are many whose hearts are upright before God, while, from a variety of circumstances, they are unknown to the world. Nathanael was not yet evangelized; nor had he attained that eminence in the divine life whereby he was afterwards distinguished: yet was he among the Lord's "hidden ones," and justly entitled to the encomium passed upon him in the text. We shall.

I. Consider the character of Nathanael—

If ever the character of any human being deserved particular attention, surely that must, which was drawn by our Lord himself. Let us notice,

1. The terms in which our Lord's testimony is expressed—

[The whole body of the Jews were called Israelites as being descended from Jacob, to whom the name of Israel was given by God himself. But we are taught to distinguish between those who were "Israelites after the flesh," and those who were Israelites in a higher and more appropriate sense; for "all were not Israel who were of Israel:" those only who partook of Jacob's spirit, were numbered amongst his spiritual seed: and hence it was that Nathanael, being a heavenly-minded man, and an earnest wrestler with God in prayer, was called "an Israelite *indeed*." But Jacob was represented as "a plain man," in opposition to his brother Esau, who was "a cunning man:" and though on two occasions his conduct was far from corresponding with this character, yet, on the whole, he was a person of guileless simplicity: and it is in reference to this that Nathanael is further said to be, a man "in whom was no guile."]

2. The facts by which that testimony is confirmed—

[The first evidence which we have of Nathanael's integrity, is *his openness to conviction*. He laboured under the prejudices which obtained through the whole of his nation, and thought that nothing good could proceed from Galilee: but when invited by Philip to "come and see" for himself, he instantly complied, in order that he might form a right judgment respecting the momentous question that was then agitated, the Messiahship of Jesus. Such candour uniformly characterizes the true Israelite — — —

The next thing we notice in him is, *his readiness to follow his convictions*. What were the particular circumstances that had taken place under the fig-tree, whether Nathanael had been adverting to Jacob's vision, or had been praying for divine instruction relative to the expected Messiah, or indeed what had been the precise workings of his mind, it is not possible for us to say: but Jesus intimated to him that he knew all that had passed there, and had approved the workings of his mind. This declaration, accompanied with a decided testimony respecting his character, convinced Nathanael that he was the true Messiah; and drew from him an unequivocal acknowledgment of his divine mission. Such a readiness to receive the truth is a further ingredient of guileless integrity — — —

We have yet another proof of his sincerity in *his determination to approve himself to God at all events*. He could not but know that the prejudices he had imbibed, were common to the whole nation; and that to become an open follower of Jesus would expose him to much obloquy and contempt. But he would not confer with flesh and blood: having found the truth, he embraced it boldly; and from that moment became a stated attendant on his Lord. This, above all, displayed the uprightness of his soul: and this decided conduct, this prosecuting of his duty without any fear of consequences, is the surest test of radical and unalloyed integrity — — —

If our Lord's testimony stood in need of confirmation, we could not wish for more ample proof of its truth than arises from the facts that are here adduced.]

After such a delineation of Nathanael's character, we may well,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

It is not to gratify our curiosity, but to edify our souls, that so many bright examples are set before us in the Scriptures. St. Paul exhorts us not only to be followers of him, but to "mark those who walk after his example." That you may be induced to imitate the example now set before you, consider,

1. The excellence of such a character—

[The righteous is deservedly said to be "more excellent than his neighbour." To compare a guileless person with one that is sensual or profane, would be to compare "light with darkness, and Christ with Belial." Let us therefore institute the comparison rather between a true Israelite, and the most moral and specious of those who retain any allowed guile: and then the superiority of a Nathanael will appear in its true light: the hypocrite may have clearer views of divine truth, and appear in many respects to greater advantage before men, but he is radically a lover of sin, and a vassal of the wicked one; while the guileless person is transformed into the divine image, and is a friend, a favourite, a child of God.

Shall not this consideration operate upon us? Can we need any other inducement to imitate the glorious character before us?]

2. The importance of attaining it—

[The time is shortly coming when all of us must appear in the presence of Christ: and, as he discerned the character of Nathanael so as to pronounce upon it with infallible certainty, so does he now weigh our spirits, as in a perfect

balance, in order that he may give to every man his proper portion of censure or applause. Of those who were truly upright he will say, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile: I saw him under the fig-tree; I heard his groans; I saw his wrestlings with God in prayer; I treasured up his tears in my vial; and I testify before all, that his heart was right with God.' But of those who harboured any secret iniquity he will say, 'Behold a man that was called an Israelite, but he was in reality a dissembler with God: he had "a name to live, but he was really dead:" I saw him under the fig-tree; I marked the secret lusts which he harboured in his heart, and the allowed neglects of which he was habitually guilty: he would follow his convictions, and devote himself to me as far as his ease, his honour, and his interests would permit, but no further: and therefore, on account of his secret reserves, and his allowed guile, he must take his portion with the hypocrites and unbelievers.'

Who can reflect on the consequences of that decision, and not desire so to live that Jesus may bear a favourable testimony on his behalf?]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who do not so much as profess to be true Israelites—

[You boast perhaps that, whatever you are, you are not hypocrites: but, though you make no profession of religion before men, the very calling of yourselves Christians implies that you acknowledge yourselves bound to follow the steps of your Divine Master. Compare then your conduct with your obligations, and think what your doom must be in the day that he shall judge the world.]

2. Those who are Israelites, but not in truth—

[If it were as easy to deceive God as it is to maintain a blameless appearance before man, we should be less anxious about your eternal interests. But the Lord Jesus searcheth the heart and trieth the reins; and will adjudge men to happiness or misery, according to the real state of their souls. We are told that he who committeth sin is of the devil; and, that whosoever is born of God sinneth not. This must certainly imply, that if we have any allowed guile, we are not true Israelites, nor can we have our portion with them. O lay to this to heart; and seek "that ye may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless."]

3. Those who are Israelites indeed—

[The ungodly world may brand you with the name of hypocrites and deceivers; but the Lord Jesus looks upon you

with pleasure and delight, and will now in your hearing, as it were, and ere long in their hearing also, bear testimony to your integrity, to the unspeakable comfort of your souls. O be careful to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man. Remember that, as your comfort depends on the preservation of your integrity, so does his honour. The ungodly may do what they will, and no reflections are cast upon religion: but if an Israelite do any thing unworthy of his profession, the Gospel itself, yea, and the Lord Jesus Christ also, is condemned for it. Cut off occasion then from those who seek occasion to calumniate the way of truth; that while you have the comfort of your integrity, God may be glorified by it, and his enemies be put to silence.]

MDCV.

THE WATER TURNED INTO WINE.

John ii. 11. *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his Disciples believed on him.*

AFTER thirty years of privacy, the time was come for our Lord to enter on his public ministrations. He had received both visible and audible testimony from heaven, and had been pointed out by his forerunner, John the Baptist, as “the Lamb of God, that should take away the sin of the world.” Now at a marriage feast he begins in a private and unostentatious way that series of miracles to which he afterwards appealed as incontrovertible proofs of his Divine mission. Who the parties were, whose nuptials were here celebrated, we know not: but, from the peculiar interest which the mother of Jesus took in accommodating the guests, we think it highly probable, that they were some friends or relatives of her own. But, however that might be, our blessed Lord made that feast the occasion of working his first public miracle, and thereby of manifesting forth his glory.

The two points for our consideration are,

- I. The manifestation which our Lord here gave of his glory—

He, by a miraculous power, turned water into wine—

[It is probable, that, when it was known that Jesus was to be at the feast, more guests came than had in the first instance been expected. Hence, after a time, the wine which had been provided, was exhausted. On this account the mother of Jesus intimated to him, that this would be a good occasion for exercising that miraculous power which she knew him to possess. But this was a liberty which she was not authorized to take: and therefore our Lord gently and respectfully reproved it; saying, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come^a.” From the direction which she immediately gave to the servants, it is evident that she did not consider the answer as a refusal, but only as an intimation that the time and manner of displaying his own glory must be left altogether to him. (We may here observe, by the way, that, if she was reproved for offering him *advice* when he was *on earth*, what shall we think of the Papists, who pray to her to issue her *commands* to him, now that he is *on his throne in heaven*?) At the season he saw fit, he ordered the servants to fill with water six large water-pots, which had been placed there with a view to some purifications or ceremonial ablutions, and they were immediately “filled to the brim.” He then ordered the servants to draw out from those vessels, and to carry the cup to the governor of the feast. The governor, unconscious of the miracle that had been wrought (which, however, the servants who had drawn the water *knew*), commended highly the superior flavour of this wine, and thus unintentionally proclaimed the miracle to the whole company. It was a miracle that did not admit of any doubt: for the vessels, being all filled to the brim, did not admit of any wine being mixed with it: and all the servants were vouchers for the miracle, and witnesses that no collusion had been practised.]

By this miracle he manifested forth his glory—

[By it he demonstrated his sufficiency for the work he had undertaken: for after that act of omnipotence and love, what was there that he either could not, or would not, effect in behalf of those who trusted in him? Whatever might be their wants for the body, he could supply them in an instant; or, whatever might be their necessities for their souls, he could make ample provision for them in the hour of need. And if in this instance he had wrought a miracle to give them what might easily have been dispensed with, what would he not do

^a Γύναι, woman, was as respectful a term as any he could use. Persons of the highest distinction were so addressed.

for them which was essential to their well-being either in time or in eternity? He might indeed withhold for a season, what they, through impatience, were too eager to obtain: but he would grant to all his believing people whatsoever should be needful for them, only reserving to himself the times and the seasons of imparting his blessings, together with the manner and the measure which his own wisdom should see most conducive to their welfare.]

Such being the manifestation which he here gave of his glory, let us notice,

II. The effect produced by it on the minds of his Disciples—

Nathanael had been convinced by one proof of Christ's omniscience, and exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel^b." Thus this one miracle, which displayed his omnipotence, was sufficient to confirm and establish the faith of his Disciples: "He manifested forth his glory; and his Disciples believed on him:" that is, they were filled with a deeper conviction of his Messiahship; they were stirred up to place a more entire affiance in him as their Saviour; and they were quickened to surrender up themselves more fully and unreservedly to his service. This was right; this was what the occasion called for, and what the miracle which they had seen, fully justified^c.

Now then this is the effect that should be produced on our minds:

1. We should receive him as the true Messiah—

[We cannot wish for clearer evidence than that which the miracles of our Lord afford us. Our blessed Lord appeals to them as decisive and incontrovertible proofs of his divine mission, and consequently of the truth of all that he spoke, and of the efficacy of all that he either did or suffered for the redemption of the world. Let no doubt then ever rest on your minds in relation to this matter: but say with Peter, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God^d."] —

^b John i. 47—50.

^c St. John afterwards refers to this miracle, as having made a deep impression on all their minds. chap. iv. 46.

^d John vi. 69.

2. We should place full affiance in him under that character—

[“ Our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption,” should be sought in him alone. We should see “all fulness of spiritual blessings treasured up in him for us,” and we should “receive them daily out of his fulness,” even “as a branch receives its sap from the vine,” or a member of our body its energies from the head. “The life which we now live in the flesh we should live altogether by faith on the Son of God, as having loved us and given himself for us.” The whole world should be to us as nothing in comparison of him; and we should “determine to know nothing,” either as an object of confidence or as a ground of glorying, “but Jesus Christ and him crucified.”]

3. We should surrender up ourselves entirely and unreservedly to his service—

[This is what all his Disciples did. Matthew left his receipt of custom, and Peter and John their nets, and all his followers their respective vocations, to follow him, and consecrate themselves to him. And this is what we also must do: we must “deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily for him, and forsake all for him;” “not counting even life itself of any value,” if it may be sacrificed for him, and to the honour of his name. This is what the whole of his mediatorial work calls for at our hands; and this is no more than “a reasonable service” for every one of his redeemed to render to him.]

From a larger view of what passed on that occasion,

I would yet further suggest two useful hints:

1. It is our privilege to seek, and to enjoy, the presence of the Lord Jesus in our social meetings—

[Religion is far from encouraging a morose seclusion from society, or from prohibiting even occasional festivities, provided they be conducted with prudence and sobriety. Doubtless what we call conviviality may easily be carried to excess: but I conceive that the very circumstance of our Lord’s working his first miracle at a wedding feast, and of his supplying of more wine for the use of the guests during the remainder of the feast*, *was intended to mark the difference between the dispensation which he introduced, and that which*

* We are not to suppose that our Lord administered to excess. The word *μεθύειν*, in ver. 10. did not apply to that company; nor, if it did, would it necessarily imply excess; for the word is often used where the most perfect sobriety was observed. See Gen. *xliii.* 34. in the LXX.

his was intended to supersede; the Jewish dispensation consisting mainly of restraints, ("touch not, taste not, handle not;") but Christianity "giving us all things richly to enjoy." But, that our liberty may not be turned into licentiousness, we should always invite the Lord Jesus Christ, if I may so say, to be a guest with us: for he has promised to "come unto us, and to sup with us, and to manifest himself unto us as he does not unto the world." And need I say how sweet our feasts will then be? Who that has ever enjoyed Christian society in a truly Christian way, has not found an infinite distance between the conviviality of the ungodly world and the refined enjoyment of heavenly converse? The very best of worldly intercourse is but "as the crackling of thorns under a pot," where the blaze that brightens the scene for a few minutes, soon expires in offensive smoke. But, where the Lord Jesus Christ vouchsafes his presence, the savour of the feast still abides upon the soul, and affords reiterated gratification in the recollection of it. Such seasons, however long since enjoyed, will afford us comfort even in a dying hour; so truly is it found on all occasions, that our blessed Saviour gives us the best wine last. Let Jesus be present at our feasts, and there will be in them neither levity nor excess; but our very festivities, instead of contributing to sensuality, shall be made to administer to the good of our souls.]

2. If we will leave our concerns to his disposal, he will surely glorify himself at last—

[If at any time our necessities be at all urgent, we are too apt to dictate to our Lord as to the time and manner of our relief. But such presumption, whoever may be guilty of it, will surely meet with a rebuke. It is sufficient for us to know that Jesus is both able and willing to supply our every want, and that he has pledged himself, that "they who seek him shall want no manner of thing that is good." Who has not already on many occasions found, that his own impatient desires, if gratified at the time, would have proved injurious to him, and that the very delay of which he once complained, has proved of most essential service to his soul? Let us then habitually commit our concerns to our all-wise and all-gracious Lord, and look to him to glorify himself in his own time and way. Then shall we have reason, ere long, to say, "He has done all things well;" and shall find at the last, that our very straits have contributed to his honour and our own eternal good.]

† John xiv. 22, 23. Rev. iii. 20.

MDCVI.

BUYERS AND SELLERS DRIVEN OUT.

John ii. 17. *And his Disciples remembered that it was written,
The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

WE are apt to think that we receive no benefit from what we read or hear, unless it produce an immediate effect upon us: but the word, like seed, often springs up long after it has been sown. God often brings it to our minds by some great and singular occurrence: and then we see a beauty and importance in it which we never saw before. The Apostles themselves forgot many things which were spoken to them by our Lord, till the Holy Spirit brought them to their remembrance. They had often heard the Psalms read in their synagogues; but probably never reflected on the passage before us, till our Lord's conduct suggested it to their minds, and cast the true light upon it.

We shall consider,

I. The circumstances which brought these words to their remembrance—

Our Lord, for the first time after his entrance on his public character, went up to Jerusalem at the Passover. There he found that the temple of God was scandalously profaned; and he immediately set himself to rectify the abuses that were there tolerated—

[The outer court of the temple was appropriated to the use of the Gentiles: but many of the Jews had rendered it a place of merchandize. There they exposed for sale the cattle that were proper to be offered in sacrifice, and stationed themselves with tables of money for the accommodation of the strangers who might want to exchange their foreign coin*. Thus they insulted the Gentiles and greatly dishonoured God. To correct this evil, our Lord exerted his divine authority. He drove out the cattle, and ordered the doves to be removed. He overturned the tables of money, and commanded all the

* Every one had occasion for a half shekel for the service of the temple, *Exod. xxx. 13—16.*

traders to depart; nor did any of the people dare to oppose his sovereign command.]

This act of his could not fail of attracting universal notice:

It discovered,

1. His holy indignation against sin—

[Such a profanation of the temple was indeed a grievous sin: nor could his righteous soul behold it without the utmost abhorrence. His anger was justly excited by the indignity offered to his Father. To have felt it less, would have been a crime; and to have refrained from manifesting it, a mark of cowardice. We indeed are not called to manifest our displeasure in the same authoritative way; but we should never behold sin but with pain and grief; nor can our indignation be ever sinful, provided it be directed against sin as its object, and be felt only in proportion to the malignity of the offence committed. We can never err, if we follow the example of those eminent saints^b—.]

2. His courageous zeal for God—

[The priests themselves were accessory to the dishonour done to God: if they did not encourage it for gain, they at least promoted it by connivance. Thus they, no less than the traders, were interested in maintaining the abuse, and, no doubt, would be forward to uphold it with all their power; but Jesus feared not the face of men, though all should combine against him. He resolutely determined to suppress these gross abominations, and, without any regard to consequences, set himself to perform his duty. Thus should we move undaunted in the way of duty; nor ever be deterred from it by the dictates of carnal policy^c.]

3. A miraculous power over the minds of men—

[What but this could prevent their rising against him? He detected their hypocrisy, reproved their impiety, mortified their pride, opposed their interests, and loaded them with disgrace. He did this singly, unarmed, unsupported, and in opposition to the existing authorities: yet, behold, they were all constrained to yield submission to his will. We cannot doubt but that he miraculously overawed their minds: nor was this a less exertion of omnipotence than any other of the miracles which he wrought.]

The sight of these things particularly affected his immediate followers, and brought to their recollection

^b Ps. cxix. 53, 136, 158. Jer. ix. 1.

^c Jer. i. 17.

a portion of Scripture which they had never before noticed,

II. The words themselves—

The words were justly quoted in reference to Christ—

[In their primary sense indeed they had their accomplishment in David. David elsewhere expresses in very strong terms his zeal for God^d: nor can we forget how he manifested it when he danced before the ark^e. But David confessedly personates the Messiah: some parts are applicable to himself, and some to Christ, alone^f. The words before us may very properly be applied to both; indeed the strength of the terms would almost lead us to confine them to Christ. His holy soul was inflamed with incessant zeal for God's honour; nor did he ever suffer one opportunity of promoting his glory to pass unimproved. The occasion now before us called forth the strongest exertions of his zeal, and manifested the full accomplishment of this prophecy in his person.]

They are also replete with useful INSTRUCTION to us—

They reprove the shameful want of zeal amongst his followers—

[God is greatly dishonoured by men on every side: his name is blasphemed, his word despised, his authority rejected. Does it become his people to behold these things with indifference? Should they not resemble Paul when he beheld the idolaters at Athens^g? Should they not imitate John^h, and adopt the words of Jeremiahⁱ? Should they not reprove sin in others as well as abstain from it themselves^k? But how miserably defective are even good people in this particular! How often do fear or shame restrain them from bearing their testimony for God! Alas! what a sad contrast does our conduct form with that of our Lord! Have we not reason then to be ashamed, and mourn for our neglect? But many, so far from rebuking sin in others, indulge it in themselves: even in the very house of God they harbour worldly and carnal thoughts; nor are at all concerned to have their hearts purified from vile affections. Surely this cannot but be most offensive to the heart-searching God. Let us remember the solemn caution given us by the Apostle^l— *With respect, to others*, let us never

^d Ps. ci. 3—8.

^e 2 Sam. vi. 14.

^f Ps. lxi. 5. cannot well be applied to any but David; nor can ver. 21. to any but Christ. It is thus that the literal and prophetic parts of scripture are continually intermixed.

^g Acts xvii. 16.

^h Mark vi. 18.

ⁱ Jer. xiii. 17.

^k Eph. v. 11.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 17.

presume to use the petulant language of Cain^m—, but rather endeavour to obey the injunction which God has given usⁿ—; and, *with respect to ourselves*, let us seek in all things that conformity to Christ which is required of us^o—.]

They afford us a proper example for our imitation—

[Phinehas of old *was called* to execute the judgment he inflicted on Zimri^p. Thus Jesus, as the Prophet of the Most High, was called to vindicate God's honour. In the same manner we should do whatever our place and station require: we must not all take on ourselves the office of magistrates, or assume the authority which does not belong to our situation and circumstances. Our zeal must be regulated by the word of God. It must be *in a good cause*; and in support of truth and virtue^q: it must be *pure*; and free from bigotry, ostentation, or wrath^r: it must be *discreet*, not precipitating us into unbecoming conduct^s: it must be *proportioned*, in a measure, *to the occasion* that excites it; and it must be *uniform*, opposing sin in ourselves, as much as in others^t. Such a zeal as this cannot be too vigorously maintained^u. An intemperate zeal will injure the cause it attempts to serve; but that which is duly tempered with meekness and wisdom, will be productive of much good^v. Let us then check the unhallowed zeal that would call fire from heaven^w, and cherish that which is meek, humble, pious and benevolent^x. Thus shall we approve ourselves to be God's peculiar people^y; and, while we please our God, shall be a blessing to all around us.]

^m Gen. iv. 9.

ⁿ Lev. xix. 17.

^o 1 John ii. 6.

^p He was a ruler himself, and acted by the command of the chief magistrate. Compare 1 Chron. ix. 20. Numb. xxv. 5, 7, 8.

^q Rom. x. 2.

^r 2 Kings x. 16.

^s Jude, ver. 22, 23.

^t Rev. iii. 19.

^u Rom. xii. 11.

^x Gal. iv. 18.

^v Luke ix. 54.

^w Jam. iii. 17.

^y Tit. ii. 14.

MDCVII.

THE RESURRECTION, A PROOF OF CHRIST'S MESSIAHSHIP.

John ii. 18, 19. *Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

THE work of reformation usually involves in difficulties those who undertake it. They who are the objects of it, however justly reprov'd, are sure to take offence, and to condemn the zeal which censures

them. No one can doubt but that the turning of God's House into a place of merchandize was a very shameful practice ; or, that to suppress it was highly commendable : yet, when our blessed Lord exerted his authority to check this abuse, the people, instead of applauding his zeal, expressed great dissatisfaction, and demanded of him, what right he had to interfere in that matter. The very awe which was impressed on all their minds, whereby they were constrained to yield to the rebukes of a poor man unsupported by any human authority, might have convinced them, that a power more than human existed in the person of the Lord Jesus : and, if they had taken occasion to make inquiries respecting him in a becoming spirit, he would no doubt have given them all reasonable satisfaction : but, as their demands arose from mere petulance, he declined satisfying them by any fresh miracle, and referred them to an event yet distant, which, when accomplished, should be a perfect answer to every inquiry.

To place this matter in a just point of view, we shall shew,

I. To what event our Lord referred—

The occasion on which the words were spoken, will reflect considerable light on the words themselves. It was common with our Lord to make the things which were immediately before him subservient to his purpose of conveying spiritual instruction : and this he did on the present occasion. He had purged the temple from the abuses to which it had been exposed. The act itself, all things considered, was miraculous. A miracle was required of him to prove his right to exercise such authority : but he, not choosing to gratify this unreasonable demand, told the Jews, that, as they had *defiled* the material temple, so they would *destroy* the temple of his body : and that, as he had *purged* the one, so he would in three days *rebuild* and restore the other : and that this latter miracle would abundantly vindicate his claim to the authority he used.

In this figurative prediction he intimated,

1. That his own body was typically represented by the temple—

[Both were formed, the one by man, and the other by God himself, as a residence for the Deity^a; and in both God vouchsafed to dwell: in the one symbolically, by a visible cloud; in the other really, personally, bodily, even in all his fulness^b — — —]

2. That they would in due time destroy it—

[His words are not to be construed as a command or advice, but simply as a prediction. He knew what they would do: he knew "what his heavenly Father had determined before to be done:" he knew what he had undertaken both to do and suffer for us: and he frequently, from his very first entrance on his ministry to the close of it, foretold the precise manner of his death, together with the various circumstances which should accompany it — — —]

3. That he, by his own power, would raise it up again in three days—

["He had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again:" and he declared that he would put forth this power to the confusion of all his enemies. He fixed the time of his resurrection, agreeably to the predictions of the prophets concerning it; a time amply sufficient for ascertaining the reality of his death, though not sufficient for his body to contract any corruption. On the accomplishment of this prophecy he rested all his pretensions to the Messiahship; and by it he would prove, that "he was indeed the very Christ" — — —]

The accomplishment of this event need not at this time to be insisted on: it is more to our purpose to shew,

II. How it proved his Divine authority—

We are told that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead." If it be asked, How did his resurrection prove his Messiahship? we answer,

1. No impostor would rest his pretensions on such an appeal as this—

[An impostor would rather confirm his authority by an appeal to something which he might accomplish in his

^a Heb. viii. 2.

^b Col. ii. 9.

life-time, in order that his credit might be raised, and his hands be strengthened for the furtherance of his designs. At all events, he would not found his hopes of success on a matter so entirely out of the reach of all human power, where the failure might be so easily, so speedily, so demonstrably ascertained: to do this would be to counteract all his own wishes, and to expose himself and his adherents to utter contempt. Such conduct would be perfect madness: and therefore we cannot suppose that our blessed Lord, who on all occasions manifested such consummate wisdom, could have pursued it. Had he been an impostor, he would at least have selected some other test, more within the bounds of credibility, and less open to detection.]

2. Supposing such an appeal made in support of an imposture, God would never work a miracle to sanction and confirm it—

[That God has permitted wonderful things to be wrought by liars and impostors, is certain: but he has at the same time afforded means for discovering the imposture; or rather, he has permitted those very wonders for the purpose of manifesting his own superior power, and confirmed thereby the faith of his people, whilst his enemies were hardened in their own wilful delusions*. But in raising up Jesus from the dead, he has not only given us no contrary testimony to counteract the impression, but has left us no room for doubt. This must have been done by himself alone: none but an Almighty power could effect it. On this one point the whole weight of our Lord's pretensions rested. Our Lord was willing to be thought an impostor, if this miracle were not wrought in his favour. What shall we say then? If God knew him to be an impostor, he himself interposed to give weight and efficacy to his imposture: he interposed to deceive his own people, and to blind the eyes of those who were most desirous to serve him aright. But can this be true? Can we for a moment admit the thought? The inference then is clear and undeniable; that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world — — —]

But it is not in speculative truths that we should rest. We proceed therefore to inquire,

III. What practical instruction is to be gathered from it—

In this part of our subject, we shall limit our observations to the event as it stands connected with the occasion on which it was foretold. We have

* Exod. vii. 11, 12—20, 22. and viii. 7, 8, 17—19. Acts viii. 9—11.

before seen that it was referred to in confirmation of the authority which our Lord had exerted. It shews us therefore,

1. That God is indignant with those who pollute his temple—

[It is common to imagine, that the frequenting of the house of God at certain seasons must of necessity be a service pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. But can our bodily presence there be pleasing to him, if our hearts be altogether occupied with the world? If our farms and our merchandize, our lusts and our pleasures, fill our minds, what will it profit us to bow our knees, or to repeat our forms of prayer? It is not *thus* that we are to worship God: “we are to worship him in spirit and in truth;” and our external services, while destitute of spiritual affections, are gross hypocrisy: and we, in presenting such services, are no better than those whom our Lord accused of turning his Father’s House into a house of merchandize.

But it is not from the outward temple only that evil should be expelled: our hearts are “the temples of the Holy Ghost,” and are therefore, at the peril of our souls, to be preserved pure: “If any man defile the temple of God,” says the Apostle, “him shall God destroy⁴.” What reason have we all to tremble at this solemn declaration! Consider, brethren, what grievous abominations have been harboured there! what a mass of filthiness, “filthiness both of flesh and spirit,” has God seen in us! what pride, envy, malice, wrath! what worldliness! what sensuality! alas! alas! “It is indeed of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, even because his compassions fail not.” We may plead custom, and a variety of other excuses, just as they did who defiled the material temple: but if our hearts be not now purged by the grace of God, it is in vain to hope that he will ever make them his residence in a future world. Let us then beg of him to drive out every hateful disposition: and, whatever scourge he may see fit to use for this purpose, let us never wish to be delivered from the pains it may inflict, till we have fully experienced its sanctified effects.]

2. That whatever pollutes his temple shall yield to the almighty power of Christ—

[When we see the extreme depravity of our hearts, and compare it with the purity of God’s holy law, we are ready to say, that it is impossible for us ever to become what God requires. But he who exerted such power over the minds of those who “made the temple a den of thieves;” who could

⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

literally have destroyed the temple and built it again in three days; and did actually raise to life again his own "crucified body;" He, I say, can easily effect the renovation of our hearts: with him all things are possible: whatever difficulties we may have to surmount, "his grace is sufficient for us" — — — We need only look to his Apostles, "who were men of like passions with us," and we may see what he can do for us. "It was by the grace of God that they were what they were:" and God is still the same as in the days of old; "his arm is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear" — — — It is to carry on his work in our hearts that Jesus is risen: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Let us then pray that we may know him in the "power of his resurrection," and "be sanctified wholly;" and that "our whole spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Faithful is He that hath called us, who also will do it!"]

• 1 Thess. v. 23.

† 1 Thess. v. 24.

MDCVIII.

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

John iii. 3. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

AS there is an essential distinction between divine and human knowledge, so is there a very great difference in the ways by which each of them is to be obtained; the one being attainable only by rational investigation, the other only by faith. Reason indeed must judge whether such or such things be revealed; but when that point is clearly ascertained, faith must receive the truth simply on the authority of God; and that too, no less when it lies beyond the sphere of our reason, than when it may easily be comprehended by it. The manner in which revealed truths are inculcated seems to imply this; for the prophets enforced their declarations, not with arguments, but with, "Thus saith the Lord:" and our Saviour, with an authority which none but himself ever presumed to exercise, and which strongly marked his equality with the Father, disdained to use any other confirmation than that of his own assertion: this appears, as

in numberless other passages, so particularly in his conversation with Nicodemus; when, instructing him in the mysterious doctrine of regeneration, he required a full assent to it upon the testimony of his own word. May we bow to his authority, while we consider,

I. The nature of regeneration—

The mistakes which very generally obtain respecting this subject being first rectified, the truth will be more clearly seen—

Many suppose that baptism is the same with regeneration—

[In the early ages of Christianity these terms were often used as synonymous, because it was taken for granted that none but truly regenerate persons would submit to a rite which engaged them to separate themselves from an ungodly world, and exposed them to the most imminent peril of their lives. But there is a wide difference between the two; regeneration being absolutely necessary to salvation, while baptism, as in the case of the dying thief, may under some circumstances be dispensed with. Besides, it was doubtless the great design of our Lord and his Apostles to regenerate and convert men: but were they so intent on administering the rite of baptism? Our Lord, we are told, “baptized no man;” and it is said of Paul, that “God sent him not to baptize;” yea, he himself “thanks God that he had baptized none but Crispus and Gaius:” but if he had regenerated none other, would he have thought *that* a proper ground for thanksgiving? Again, if baptism and regeneration be the same thing, we may use them altogether as synonymous terms: now it is said that “Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world^a,” and that “he neither *doth* sin nor *can* sin, because he is born of God^b.” But if we should say the same of all that are baptized, would not the worldly and sinful lives of many flatly contradict us? It appears then from the superior importance of regeneration, from the design of Christ and his Apostles respecting it, and from the properties ascribed to it in Scripture, that it neither is, nor can be, the same with baptism. Baptism is an outward work of man upon the body; regeneration is an inward work of God upon the soul.]

Others think that regeneration imports no more than an outward reformation, or at most, a partial change of the inward man—

^a 1 John v. 4.

^b 1 John iii. 9.

[But can we conceive that, when a ruler of the Jews came to our Lord, acknowledging him to be a teacher sent from God, and desiring to be instructed in those things which he was come to reveal, our Lord would tell him that wicked men could not be saved without reforming their lives? Did Nicodemus need such information as that? Or, if this was all that our Lord meant, would this teacher in Israel have been so astonished at it? And would not our Lord have instantly rectified his misapprehension, and shewn him that there was no cause for astonishment? Can we imagine that our Lord would have confirmed the mistake, by representing this doctrine as an incomprehensible mystery, which man can no more fathom, than he can ascertain the hidden causes, or mark the exact boundaries, of the wind? Yea, would he have left this man so bewildered, saying, How can these things be! if he had meant no more than, that a wicked man must reform his life? Nor is it less evident that regeneration does not consist in a partial change even of the inward man. To what purpose should we boast of having experienced the illumination of Balaam^c, the humiliation of Ahab^d, the confession of Judas^e; the faith of Simon Magus^f, the confidence of the unbelieving Jews^g, the attention of Ezekiel's auditors^h, the reformation of Herodⁱ, or (what perhaps includes all these together) the promising appearance of the stony-ground hearers^k, if, like them, we rest in any partial change? Surely, if our righteousness exceed not theirs, we cannot hope that we shall be happier than they in our final doom.]

In opposition to all such erroneous notions, the Scripture itself defines regeneration to be "a new creation, wherein old things pass away, and ALL things become new^l."

[The author of this work is the Holy Spirit, who by a supernatural agency renews our inward man, and makes us partakers of a divine nature^m. Our faculties indeed remain the same as they were before; but there is a new direction given to them all. Our *understanding* is enlightened, so that we behold ourselves, and Christ, and the world, yea, every thing else too, in a very different light from what we ever did beforeⁿ — — — Our *will* is changed, so that instead of following, or even desiring to follow, our own way, we surrender up ourselves altogether to God's government, saying most unfeignedly, Not my will, but thine be done^o — — — Our

^c Numb. xxiv. 4.

^d 1 Kings xxi. 29.

^e Matt. xxvii. 4.

^f Acts viii. 13, 21, 28.

^g John viii. 41, 42.

^h Esek. xxxiii. 31.

ⁱ Mark vi. 20, 27.

^k Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

^l 2 Cor. v. 17.

^m 2 Pet. i. 4.

ⁿ Acts ii. 37—47.

^o Acts ix. 6.

affections also are exercised in a very different manner from what they were before, so that, instead of being called forth principally by the things of time and sense, they are set upon things spiritual and eternal^p — — — We say not that this change is perfect in any man, (for there still are sad remains of the old and corrupt nature even in the best of men; the leprosy is never wholly removed till the walls be taken down.) But the change is universal in all the faculties, and progressive throughout our lives: nor can it be effected by any efforts of man, or by any other power than that of God^q.]

As the Scriptures give this extensive view of regeneration, so they fully declare,

II. The necessity of it—

“The kingdom of God” sometimes imports the kingdom of grace on earth, and sometimes the kingdom of glory in heaven. Indeed both are one and the same kingdom, subject to the same Head, composed of the same members, and governed by the same laws: grace is glory begun; glory is grace consummated. But for the purpose of illustrating our subject, we observe that, without regeneration,

1. We cannot enter into God’s kingdom of grace—

[There are many duties to be performed, and many privileges to be enjoyed, by the subjects of God’s spiritual kingdom, which an unregenerate man can *neither perform nor enjoy*. Who can doubt whether it be our duty to “repent in dust and ashes,” to “live by faith on the Son of God,” or to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts?” But can an unregenerate man do these things? We acknowledge that he may restrain in many respects his outward conduct; but can he root out from his heart the *love* of the world, and the *love* of sin? Can he truly lothe and abhor himself as well for the unhallowed corruptions of his heart, as for the grosser transgressions of his life? As well may he attempt to create a world as to effect these things by any power of his own. Again; it is the Christian’s privilege to enjoy that “peace of God which passeth all understanding,” to “abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost,” and to be transported with that “joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.” But can an unregenerate man possess that peace, when his iniquities are not forgiven? Can he look forward with delight to the coming of the day of Christ, when all his desires and pursuits terminate in this lower world? Can he be so elevated with

^p Col. iii. 2.

^q John i. 13.

holy joy, when there is nothing in his state which does not rather call for rivers of tears? But if any one doubt what answer he must return to these questions, let him go to his chamber, and see whether he be competent to form his mind to these sublime employments; and he will soon find that no power but that which created our souls at first, can form them anew after the Divine image.]

2. We cannot enter into the kingdom of glory—

[*There is a meetness for the heavenly inheritance*^r, which every one must attain, before he can enjoy the felicity of the saints in light. As, on earth, no occupation can afford us pleasure, if we have not an inward taste and relish for it, so, in heaven, we must have dispositions suited to the state of those above. But where is this disposition to be obtained, if not in this life? Can it be thought that there shall be “repentance in the grave,” and that we shall become regenerate in a future state? Shall he, who never supremely loved his God, become at once inflamed with devout affection towards him? Shall not he, who never was renewed after the Divine image, rather behold with dread and horror the holiness of God, and tremble at the sight of that Lamb, whose dying love he despised, and whose blood he trampled under foot? Shall he, who never sought one hour’s communion with God in secret, delight to have no other employment to all eternity? No; “as the tree falleth, so it lieth;” “he that was unjust will be unjust still; and he that was filthy will be filthy still.” As there is this reason on the part of man, so is there a still more cogent reason on the part of God. *God has declared*, with repeated and most solemn asseverations, that “*except a man be born again, he shall never enter into his kingdom.*” And has he spoken thus merely to alarm us? “Is he a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent?” Will he dishonour himself to favour us? Will he violate the rights of justice, holiness, and truth, in order to save those, who, to their dying hour, rejected and despised his proffered mercy? If all the world tell you that you *shall* be admitted into heaven, believe them not: for the Judge of quick and dead has with the strongest possible asseverations declared, you never shall. Let us not then deceive ourselves with such vain hopes: for they can terminate in nothing but disappointment and ruin.]

ADDRESS—

1. The unregenerate—

[You cannot surely be at a loss to know your real state, if you will examine candidly whether you have ever experienced such a change in your views, desires, and pursuits,

^r Col. i. 12.

as has been before described? O, let every one put home to his conscience this question, *Am I born again?* And know that neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision will avail you any thing, but a new creation*. *You must be born again, or perish* — — —]

2. The regenerate—

[St. Peter, writing to such persons under the severest persecution, begins his Epistle with congratulations†: and St. Paul bids us under the heaviest calamities to be thankful for renewing grace". Do ye then bless God in every state, and "shew forth the *virtues* of him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory" — — — Let your renovation be progressive; and never think that you have attained any thing as long as any thing remains to be attained.]

* Gal. vi. 15.

† 1 Pet. i. 1, 3, 4.

" Col. i. 11—13.

z 'Aperdç. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

MDCIX.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT A TYPE OF CHRIST.

John iii. 14, 15. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

A MORE instructive portion of Scripture than this before us we cannot easily find. The conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus was intended to lead him to the knowledge of salvation: and, being directed to a person of his rank, and high attainments in morality, it will serve as a model for our instructions to the greatest and best of men. The first point which our Lord insisted on was the necessity of a new birth: for, whatever our attainments be, it is impossible for us to enter into heaven till this has taken place in our souls; since we brought nothing into the world with us but what is carnal; and we must possess a spiritual nature, before we can be capable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom. But besides this, it is necessary also that we be interested in his atoning sacrifice: for, having once contracted guilt, we must be purged from that guilt, before we can be admitted into the Divine

presence: and there is nothing but his atoning sacrifice that can avail for this. Hence our Lord, after shewing Nicodemus that he must experience a change of nature by means of a new and heavenly birth, tells him, that he must prepare to see the Messiah crucified for the sins of men, and must look to him for the healing of his soul as the dying Israelites did to the brazen serpent for the healing of the wounds inflicted by the fiery serpents in the wilderness.

The parallel which our Lord here draws between the brazen serpent and himself, represents that as the type, and himself as the antitype: and, that we may fully understand it, I will trace the resemblance,

I. In the occasion on which the type was instituted—

The Israelites were dying of the wounds received from the fiery flying serpents—

[They had provoked God by their murmuring and rebellion*—— and to punish them God had sent fiery serpents which they could in no wise avoid, and whose bite was mortal. To heal themselves was beyond their power. Multitudes died: and many, finding that they must die, unless God should graciously interpose for them, entreated Moses to intercede for them: and in answer to his intercession God appointed that a brazen serpent should be erected, and that by looking to it they should be healed.]

Similar to this was our state when God gave his Son to be nailed upon the cross—

[Through the agency of that old serpent the devil, sin had entered the world, and inflicted a deadly wound on every child of man. To heal ourselves was impossible. Death, eternal death, awaited us. And, as the only means of averting it, God, in tender mercy, sent his only dear Son into the world to die for us, and to save all who would look unto him for salvation.

But if there was in this respect a great resemblance between the occasions that existed for the erection of the serpent, and the exaltation of our blessed Lord upon the cross, there was also a material difference between them; the one being in answer to the prayers of men, the other being given unsolicited and unsought: the one also being appointed as a mere arbitrary ordinance, that had no suitableness to the end proposed

* Numb. xxi. 4—6.

the other being appointed to make satisfaction for the sins of men, and to merit in our behalf the Divine favour.

In both cases, however, the occasion was the same : death was inflicted as the punishment of sin ; and the remedy, the only remedy, against it, in either case, was to look to the object, proposed by God, and lifted up by man, for our relief.]

But let us contemplate the type yet more particularly,

II. In the end of its appointment—

The serpent was erected that all who were bitten might look unto it and live.

[An assurance was given to Moses, that all who looked to the brazen serpent should live. And so it proved, in fact. Not one who directed his eyes to it, died. However desperate his wounds might be, or however distant he might be from the object, so as scarcely to have any clear view of it at all, yet, instantly on looking to it he was healed.]

And does not the crucifixion of our Lord ensure the same benefit to those who look unto him—

[It matters not how long, or how grievously, any man may have sinned, provided he look truly and humbly to the Lord Jesus Christ as dying for him. As for the brazen serpent, it had no suitableness whatever to the end proposed. It was a mere arbitrary appointment of the Deity : and was available in that view alone. But the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross under the guilt of all our sins, and offered a full and perfect satisfaction for them to Divine justice. True, indeed, to the judgment of carnal reason, *that* also appears “ foolishness : ” but it was in reality the most stupendous effort of “ divine power and wisdom ; ” and it has in itself a proper suitableness and sufficiency for the salvation of all who trust in it. We may therefore safely assure every child of man, that, if he believe in Jesus, “ he shall never perish, but shall have eternal life.” Nor shall the conferring of this benefit be delayed. The sight of the brazen serpent healed *instantly* the dying Israelite : and so shall a sight of Jesus *instantly* remove the guilt of all our sins, and infuse into our souls a new and heavenly life. Nor shall the blessing *ever terminate*. The benefit that accrued to those who looked to the brazen serpent lasted but for a time : but that which the believer in Jesus shall receive, shall endure for ever and ever.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who feel not their need of such a remedy—

[Such persons existed in the camp of Israel : but where

shall one be found in our camp? Where is there one whose whole man is not impregnated with the venom of sin? If you feel it not, *that* only shews that your wounds are the more deep and deadly: but know assuredly, that, unless you be brought to a sense of your perishing condition, your doom is sealed; and in a little time you will perish for ever.]

2. Those who would substitute some other remedy in the place of Christ—

[What would have become of any man who should have persisted in devising some mode of healing himself, instead of looking to the brazen serpent? He must of necessity have died. And no other fate awaits you, if you will be substituting your own works, whether in whole or in part, in the place of Christ. Every other hope must be utterly renounced, and Christ alone be made the one object of your affiance.]

3. Those who desire the healing of their souls—

[Make the Israelites a pattern for yourselves. When they felt in themselves that they were dying, they sought after God through Moses their mediator; and confessed their sins, and implored mercy, and thankfully availed themselves of the proffered benefit, seeking it humbly in God's appointed way. Thus then do ye also: seek your God through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man; and with deep contrition implore mercy at his hands: then direct your eyes to the cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for you; and doubt not but that you shall be made monuments of his grace and mercy to all eternity. Let no doubt about his sufficiency or your own worthiness keep you from him: for he "is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" and "*whosoever*" believeth in him shall assuredly be saved^b."]

4. Those who doubt whether this mode of healing will not encourage sin—

[Such doubts were entertained in the Apostle's days: but he spurned at the idea with holy indignation: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." What think you? Would an Israelite have taken one of the fiery serpents to his bosom, because he had been healed of his wounds, and because the same means of healing were yet open to him? How much less would one who has felt the bitterness of sin, cherish it any longer in his bosom, because he has obtained deliverance from its guilt and condemnation? When he reflects that nothing but the crucifixion of the Son of God

^b Isai. xlv. 22.

could heal him, will he think lightly of his sins? Will he not rather "look on him whom his sins have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born?" Truly this is the proper effect of faith in Christ, who, if he redeem us from guilt and condemnation, will also "purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."]

MDCX.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN GIVING HIS SON FOR MAN.

John iii. 16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

THE doctrine of our reconciliation with God through the death of his Son, is calculated to impress our minds with a deep sense of the love of Christ in undertaking for us; but, if not cautiously stated, it may give us very erroneous conceptions respecting the Father. If, for instance, we imagine that the Father needed the mediation of his Son to render him propitious, then we must ascribe all the glory of our salvation to the Son, and consider the Father merely as acquiescing in the Son's wishes, and shewing mercy to us for his sake. But the whole plan of our salvation originated with the Father: the very gift of a Saviour was the fruit of the Father's love; and therefore, in contemplating the wonders of Redemption, we must trace them to their proper source, the love of God the Father.

To this view of things we are led by the text; in elucidating which, we shall not form any particular arrangement, but simply take the several expressions contained in it, and use them as so many mirrors to reflect light upon one central point, *the love of God the Father in sending his only-begotten Son to die for us.*

Consider then, first, *the Giver*—

[If man confer a benefit upon his fellow-creature, we are not surprised; because there is no man so elevated, but he may need the assistance of his inferiors; nor is there any man so depressed, but he may, at some period or other, have it in his power to requite a kindness. But "God" is totally independent

of us; "our goodness extendeth not to him^a;" "it is no profit to him that we are righteous^b:" he would have been equally happy and glorious, though no creature had ever been formed; and he would remain so, if every creature in the universe were annihilated. How wonderful, then, was it, that he should condescend to look on us; yea, that he should take such an interest in our affairs, as to supply, at a most incalculable price, our pressing necessities! Even in this first view of his love we are lost with wonder.]

But our admiration will be greatly increased, if we reflect upon *the gift*—

[It was his Son, "his only-begotten Son," whom he vouchsafed to give. It was not a creature; no, not the first of all created beings, but his co-equal, co-eternal Son^c; who from eternity had been in his bosom^d, and "daily his delight^e." A less gift than that would not have sufficed for our relief: and a greater, God himself was not able to bestow. In comparison of this, ten thousand angels would have been as nothing; yea, all the hosts of heaven would not have been more than a grain of sand is in comparison of the universe. Yet God, seeing our wants, "sent his own Son to be a propitiation for our sins^f." What manner of love was this! How "incomprehensible are its breadth and length, and depth and height^g!"]

Additional lustre will be reflected on this mystery, if we consider *the manner in which he bestowed this gift*—

[He waited not to be solicited: indeed no creature could have asked for such a favour: the thought could not have entered into the mind of any created intelligence; nor, if it had occurred, could he have presumed to utter it. But God needed no suggestion from his creatures: his love prevented their requests^h; it even provided for their wants before those wants existed, yea, before the creatures themselves had any being. He himself is loveⁱ; and the exercise of mercy is his delight^k. He neither had, nor could have, any inducement from without: all his motives were found within his own bosom: the displaying of his own unbounded love was a sufficient reason for his utmost exertions: he shewed mercy for mercy sake; and "gave," because it was the joy of his soul to give.]

^a Ps. xvi. 2.

^b Job xxii. 2, 3.

^c Mic. v. 2.

^d John i. 13.

^e Prov. viii. 22—30.

^f 1 John iv. 9, 10.

^g 1 John iv. 9, 10. with Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^h God, instead of following our first parents with denunciations of wrath, gave, unsolicited, that promise, which was the foundation of hope to them and all their posterity. Gen. iii. 15.

ⁱ 1 John iv. 16.

^k Mic. vii. 18.

But how will this stupendous love be heightened in our esteem, if we take into consideration *the persons on whom this gift was bestowed!*

[It was not vouchsafed to angels, though angels needed it as much as we. This was a mercy reserved for fallen man, even for "the world" that lieth in wickedness¹. To form an estimate of the world, let us look around us, and see to what an awful extent iniquity abounds: or, if we would have our judgment still more according to truth, let us look within our own hearts, and see what horrible abominations are harboured there. We know nothing of others, but by their words and actions: but we have a juster criterion within our own bosoms: we may search into our own thoughts and desires; we may discern the base mixture that there is in all our motives and principles of action: in short, we may see such "a world of iniquity" within us, as may well constrain us to say, with David, "My heart sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly, that there is no fear of God before his eyes^m:" yes, in our own hearts there is an epitome of all the evil that is in the world: and, if we know any thing of ourselves, we shall stand amazed that God should look upon such a world as this, and give his only dear Son to save those who so richly merited his hottest indignation.]

We cannot do justice to this subject, if we do not further notice *God's ultimate design in bestowing this precious gift upon us—*

[We must, but for this marvellous effort of divine love, have perished in our sins. Having resembled the fallen angels in their sin, we must have resembled them also in their misery. But "God would not that we should perish." Notwithstanding the greatness and universality of our guilt, he would not that we should suffer according to our desert; and therefore he interposed for our deliverance. But this was not all. He desired to restore us to our forfeited inheritance, and to bring us to the possession of "everlasting life." It was not enough for him to save us from perishing; he must also renovate us after his own image, and make us partakers of his own glory. What stupendous love was this! That he should ever think of receiving such hateful creatures into his presence; that he should lay a plan for the exalting of them to thrones and kingdoms in heaven; and that he should even give his only-begotten Son out of his bosom to effect it! How infinitely does this surpass all the comprehension of men or angels!]

The condition which he has imposed for our partici-

¹ Heb. ii. 16.

^m Ps. xxxvi. 1. Prayer-book translation.

pation of these benefits, yet further illustrates and magnifies his love—

[Suppose God had said, “Find me fifty righteous, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or only ten, and for their sakes I will pardon and save all the rest^a:” we must have perished, because among the whole human race there is “not one righteous, no, not one.”

Suppose that, instead of this, he had said, “I will give my Son to die for your past offences, and will bring you back to a state of probation; whereby, if you fall not again from your righteousness, you shall be saved:” the offer had been exceeding kind and gracious; but we should not long have reaped any solid advantage from it: we should soon have broken the covenant again, and been involved in the same misery as before.

Suppose God had said, “I foresee that a renewal of your former covenant would be to no purpose; and therefore my Son shall work out a righteousness for you; and I require nothing of you, but to add to that a righteousness of your own, that the two righteousnesses together may form a joint ground of your acceptance with me:” alas! we should have been in as deplorable a state as ever; for we never have done, nor ever can do, one single act, which, if weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, will not be found wanting.

But suppose God yet further to lower his demands, and to say, “I will give you a complete salvation through the blood and righteousness of my dear Son; and I will require nothing of you, but only to render yourselves worthy of it:” still had our state been altogether hopeless; for we can no more render ourselves worthy of such a mercy, that we can create a world.

This was well known to God; and therefore he proposed none of these things: he requires only that we should believe in his Son, and accept freely what he so freely offers. It is true, that, if even this depended on ourselves, we should perish: because without the grace of God we cannot exercise saving faith^p: but still this is the condition, which alone is suited to our helpless state; because it implies a total renunciation of all merit or strength in ourselves, and leads us to Christ, that we may find our all in him. O how does this enhance the love of God! And in what bright colours does that love appear, when viewed in the light which so many mirrors reflect upon it!]

If any thing can add to the lustre with which his love already shines, it is the *extent in which the offers of these benefits are made*—

^a Gen. xviii. 24—32.

^o Rom. iii. 10.

^p Phil. i. 29.

[There is not a human being upon earth, who shall not be a partaker of all these benefits, if only he believe in Christ. There is no limitation, no exception: God gave his Son, that "whosoever" believeth in him should not perish. Past sins, however numerous or heinous, are no bar to our acceptance with God, if only we accept his mercy on the terms on which it is offered. This is the uniform testimony of Holy Writ^a ——— O let us magnify God for his mercy; and be telling of the wonders of his love from day to day!]

INFER—

1. How aggravated must be the condemnation of them that reject the Gospel!

[Our Lord says, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil^b." Let this sink down into our ears: for, if such love cannot melt us into contrition, and such goodness bring us to repentance, we may well expect a most accumulated weight of vengeance at the hands of an offended God.]

2. How groundless are the fears of many who embrace the truth!

[Many sincere Christians are troubled in mind; some on account of their temporal wants, and others on account of their spiritual necessities. But "if God has delivered up his own Son for us, will he not with him also freely give us all things^c?" And "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life^d." These are unanswerable arguments; and they should compose our minds under trials, of whatever kind.]

3. How deeply should we all be affected by the love of God!

[Pungent indeed is that question, "What could I have done more for my vineyard, that I have not done^e?" The more we consider how God has loved the world, the more we shall see, that he has indeed done all for us that he could do, consistently with our free agency, and his own honour. And when he has so loved the world, are we at liberty to forget him? Does such love call for no return? or are we to requite it only by increased impiety? O let every one of us say, "What shall I render to the Lord?" And let his love to us constrain us to devote ourselves unreservedly to him.]

^a Isai. xlv. 22. and lv. 1. and Rev. xxii. 17. and John vi. 37.

^b John iii. 19. ^c Rom. viii. 32. ^d Rom. v. 10 ^e Isai. v. 4

MDCXI.

THE END FOR WHICH GOD SENT HIS SON.

John iii. 17. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

AN expectation generally prevailed among the Jews that their Messiah would interpose on behalf of their nation alone, and bring all other kingdoms into subjection to them. Our Lord took frequent occasions to rectify this mistake, and to shew, that he was to be the Saviour, not of one people only, but of the whole world. In this discourse with Nicodemus, he introduces this important subject in such a way as to inform his mind, without shocking his prejudices. Having explained to him the nature and necessity of regeneration, and shewn him, by reference to a well-known type, the way of salvation, he declares, that the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews, were to participate the benefits of his coming; and that God, in sending him into the world, had as much respect to the welfare of the benighted heathens as of his chosen and peculiar people. To elucidate the words before us, we shall shew,

- I. That, supposing God to send his Son into the world, it was far more probable that he should send him to condemn the world than to save it—

That God should ever send his Son into the world at all is such a mystery as must for ever fill the whole universe with amazement. But supposing him to make known his determination to do so, the probability certainly was that it should be for our destruction rather than our salvation—

1. Consider what was the state of the world at the time he did send his Son—

[Had he seen the greater part of mankind lamenting their fall, wishing earnestly that some way could be devised for their recovery, and struggling, but with unsuccessful efforts, to get free from sin, we might have supposed that God would exercise mercy towards us, and open a way for our restoration through the sacrifice of his Son. But when the whole mass

of mankind were up in arms against him, when not one of the whole human race (except a few whose hearts he himself had touched) desired reconciliation with him; yea, when all were utterly averse from it, and desired nothing so much as to live in sin with impunity, and wished for no better heaven than the unrestrained indulgence of their lusts; for what end could God send his Son, but to execute upon them the vengeance they deserved?]

2. Consider for what end God had before sent messengers from heaven—

[God had on some remarkable occasions commissioned angels to perform his will: and though, when sent to some highly-favoured individuals, they were messengers of mercy, yet, when sent to the avowed enemies of God, they were, for the most part, ministers of wrath to execute the most signal vengeance. Who can contemplate Sodom and the cities of the plain; who can call to mind the Egyptian first-born; who can survey one hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers lying dead in the Assyrian camp; and not tremble at the thought of a messenger being sent from heaven? Suppose then we should hear that God was about to send his own Son from heaven to execute his will with respect to the whole world, and especially such a world as this; what would any one imagine, but that, as it was not a particular city or nation that God was about to punish, but a whole world, he had determined to employ his own Son; and that the judgments he was about to inflict, would be great in proportion to the power and dignity of the executioner? As for conceiving the idea that he should send his Son to *save* the world, it would not so much as enter into the mind of any created being.]

3. Consider that God certainly foreknew the way in which the world would treat his Son—

[If God had not certainly foreknown all future events, he might perhaps have reasoned thus: 'I have sent to that wretched world my servants the prophets, and instead of attending to them they have persecuted them even unto death: but if I should send them my Son, surely they would reverence HIM; they would not dare to lift up a finger against him; they would be so struck with wonder at my condescension and love, that they would return instantly to their allegiance. Rather therefore than they should perish, I will send them my Son to save them.' But God knew that instead of reverencing his Son, they would no sooner see him, than they would exclaim, "This is the heir; come let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours." He knew full well that, however manifest the credentials of his Son, and however indisputable the evidences

of his divine mission, they would not believe in him, but would cast him out of the vineyard and slay him. What then must we suppose God would say on such an occasion? Surely he would speak to this effect: 'If I could hope that they would reverence my Son, I would overlook all the injuries done to my prophets, and would even send my Son for their salvation: but I know they would all thirst for his blood; they would pluck *me* from my throne if they were able; and, if I should put my Son into their power, they would load him with all manner of indignities, and put him to the most ignominious death: shall I then, foreseeing these things as I do, put him into their power? No: *that* were unworthy of my majesty, and degrading to my Son. I may possibly send my Son; but, if I do, it shall not be to save the world, but to condemn them according to their desert.']

These considerations fully evince the improbability that God should ever use the mediation of his Son in a way of mercy towards us. Yet we must add,

II. That, notwithstanding it was so improbable, God did really send his Son, not to condemn, but to save the world—

The frequency with which we hear of this stupendous mystery, prevents the surprise which the declaration of it must otherwise excite. But, whatever the ignorance of scoffers, and the pride of infidels may suggest, be it known to all, that God did send his Son,

1. To expiate sin—

[God knew that it was impossible for man to atone for sin — — — Yet it was also impossible that sin could be forgiven, unless an adequate atonement were offered to the Divine Majesty — — — What was to be done? The angels, even if they were willing, were not able to undertake our cause. There was but one, even in heaven, that was competent to the mighty task of appeasing incensed Majesty, and of satisfying offended justice: there was none but Jesus, the best-beloved of the Father, who from eternity had lain in his bosom. And would the Father give HIM? Yes; "He spared not his own Son, but delivered HIM up for us all." "He prepared him a body," and "sent him to be a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world" — — — What amazing love! Eternity will not suffice to explore and celebrate this stupendous mystery.]

2. To work out a righteousness for us—

[Mankind were as unable to provide for themselves a righteousness wherein they might stand before God, as they were to make an atonement for their past offences — — — But, behold, God would not leave us destitute; he gave his Son to fulfil the law which we had broken, and, "to bring in an everlasting righteousness," "which should be unto all and upon all them that believe" — — — The name given him on this very account is, "The Lord our Righteousness." Clothed in his unspotted robe, the vilest of returning prodigals may stand perfect and complete in the presence of their God — — — Every one of them may say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."]

3. To exalt us to glory—

[It was not only to begin, but to carry on and perfect our salvation, that the Father sent his Son into the world. He is to be both "the author and the finisher of our faith" — — — Having delivered our souls from the guilt of sin, and from the powers of darkness, he will raise up our bodies also from the grave, and exalt us to sit upon his throne for evermore — — — Never will he cease from his work, till he has fully and finally accomplished it on behalf of his people — — — How wonderful is this! Surely it almost exceeds belief: that, instead of condemning the world, God should send his Son to save it, to save it by laying down his own life a ransom for us, and by managing all the concerns of every one of his elect till he shall have finally established them in the possession of their heavenly inheritance! Hear, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth: yea, let all the choirs of heaven make it the everlasting subject of their highest praises — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are regardless of their own salvation—

[Alas! how little effect do the wonders of redemption produce on the world at large! But what an aggravation of their guilt will it be to have poured contempt upon the Son of God! Surely God's greatest mercy will prove their heaviest curse. The very devils will have more to say on their own behalf than they. Satan himself may say, "I never had salvation offered me; I never sinned against *redeeming* love." But careless sinners are daily "trampling under foot the Son of God," who lived and died to save them. O lay this to heart, and seek an interest in him who alone can deliver you from the wrath to come.]

2. Those who are ready to doubt whether they ever can be saved—

[Many such there are in the Church of Christ — — — But did God send his Son to execute a work which he was not

able to perform? or has Jesus discovered any backwardness to fulfil his engagements? — — — Let not any be afraid: for if a whole world is to be saved by him, he cannot but have a sufficiency to supply all our wants, provided we commit ourselves entirely to him — — —]

3. Those who are enjoying salvation—

[While you are reaping the blessed fruits of the Father's love, surely you will often say, what shall I render to the Lord? If he gave up his dear Son for my salvation, shall not I give up a bosom lust for his glory? — — — Think how much you are indebted to him; and endeavour to glorify him with your body and your spirit which are his.]

MDCXII.

MEN'S HATRED OF THE LIGHT.

John iii. 19—21. *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

IT appears strange to many, that the everlasting happiness or misery of the soul should be made to depend on the exercise of faith. The declaration of our Lord, That "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," is regarded by them as a "hard saying;" they see no proportion between the work and the reward on the one hand, or between the offence and the punishment on the other. In the words before us we have a solution of the difficulty. We are taught that faith and unbelief are not mere operations of the mind, but exercises of the heart; the one proceeding from a love to what is good; the other from a radical attachment to evil. Our blessed Lord had repeatedly inculcated the necessity of believing in him, in order to a participation of his proffered benefits. He had also represented unbelievers as "already condemned," even like criminals reserved for execution. To obviate any objection which might arise in the mind of Nicodemus

in relation to the apparent severity of this sentence, he proceeded to shew the true ground of it, namely, That, in their rejection of him, men are actuated by an invincible love of sin, and by a consequent hatred of the light which is sent to turn them from sin.

In opening the words of our text, we shall shew,

I. What is that light which is come into the world—

Christ is called “The light of the world,” “The true light,” “The Day-star,” and “The Sun of righteousness that arises with healing in his wings.” But,

It is *the Gospel* which is here said to have “come into the world”—

[The glad tidings of salvation were now published by Christ himself; and both the manner in which that salvation was to be effected, and the manner in which it was to be received, were clearly revealed. Our blessed Lord had in this very discourse with Nicodemus declared, that “the Son of Man was to be lifted up upon the cross, as the serpent had been in the wilderness,” in order that all who were dying of the wounds of sin might look to him and be healed. He had repeated again and again this important truth, on which the salvation of our fallen race depends. This mystery had from eternity been hid in the bosom of the Father; but now it was made fully manifest. *This “light was now come into the world.”*]

The Gospel, in this view of it, is fitly designated under the metaphor of “light”—

[*Light is that, without which no one thing can be discerned aright.* And how ignorant are we, till the light of the Gospel shines in our hearts! We know nothing of ourselves, of God, of Christ, or of the way to heaven. We cannot even appreciate the value of the soul, the importance of time, the emptiness of earthly vanities. We may indeed give our assent to the statements which we hear made upon these subjects; but we cannot have an experimental and abiding sense, even of the most obvious truths, till our minds are enlightened by the Gospel of Christ.

Light causes all other things to be seen in their true colours. Thus does also the Gospel: in setting forth the Son of God as dying for our sins, it shews us the malignity of sin; the justice of God which required such an atonement for it; and, above all, the wonderful love of God in giving us his only dear

Son, in order that we might have peace through the blood of his cross.

Light carries its own evidence along with it. Thus does also that glorious Gospel of which we are speaking: it is so peculiarly suited to the necessities of man, and at the same time so commensurate with his wants; it is so calculated to display and magnify all the perfections of the Deity, and is in every respect so worthy of its Divine Author; that it commends itself to us instantly as of heavenly origin, the very masterpiece of Divine wisdom.]

One would imagine that such light should be universally welcomed: but since this is not the case, we shall proceed to shew,

II. Whence it is that men reject it—

It is but too evident, that, as in former ages, so now also, men reject the light. But whence does this arise? It is not because they have any sufficient reason to reject it—

[If there were any thing in the Gospel that rendered it unworthy of men's regard, they would have some excuse for rejecting it. But,

They cannot say that it is *inapplicable in its nature*.—We will appeal to the world, and ask, What is there, that guilty and helpless sinners would desire? Would they wish for a Saviour? Would they be glad that the whole work of salvation should be committed into his hands? Would they be especially desirous that nothing should be required of them, but to receive with gratitude, and improve with diligence, what the Saviour offers them? In short, would they be glad of a free and full salvation? *This* is precisely such a salvation as is provided for them in the Gospel.

They cannot say that it is *inadequate in its provisions*.—If the Gospel brought salvation to those only who were possessed of some amiable qualities, or to those who had committed only a certain number of offences; if it made any limitation or exception whatever in its offers of mercy; if it provided pardon, but not strength, or grace to begin our course, but not grace to persevere; if, in short, it omitted any one thing which any sinner in the universe could need, then some persons might say, 'It is not commensurate with my necessities.' But we defy the imagination of man to conceive any case which the Gospel cannot reach, or any want which it cannot satisfy.

They cannot say that it is *unreasonable in its demands*.—It does indeed require an unreserved surrender of ourselves to God: and on this account it appears to many to be strict and

severe. But let any one examine all its prohibitions and all its commands, and he will find them all amounting in fact to these two; "Do thyself no harm;" and, "Seek to be as happy as thy heart can wish." If there be any thing in the Gospel which bears a different aspect, it is owing entirely to our ignorance of its real import. The more thoroughly the Gospel is understood, the more worthy of acceptance will it invariably appear.]

The only true reason is, that they "hate the light"—

[Till men are truly converted to God, "their deeds are universally evil;" yea "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually." Now the Gospel is a light which shews their deeds in their proper colours.

It reproves their ways.—They have been "calling good evil, and evil good; and putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." In reference to these things, it undeceives them. It declares plainly, that they who do such things as they have done, and perhaps have accounted innocent, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

It mortifies their pride.—It not only shews them that they are obnoxious to the wrath of God, but that they are incapable of averting his displeasure by any thing which they themselves can do. It brings down the proud Pharisee, and places him on a level with publicans and harlots. It requires every man to acknowledge himself a debtor to divine grace for every good thing that he either has or hopes for. All this is extremely humiliating to our proud nature.

It inculcates duties which they are unwilling to perform.—Humility and self-denial, renunciation of the world and devotedness to God, enduring of shame and glorying in the cross; these, and many other duties, it enjoins, which to our carnal and corrupt nature are hateful in the extreme: yet the Gospel inculcates them with a strictness not to be lowered, a plainness not to be misinterpreted, and an authority not to be withstood.

These, these are the grounds on which the Gospel is rejected. If it would admit of persons following their own ways, or of their accommodating its precepts to their own views or interests, they would give it a favourable reception. But as it requires all to be cast into the very mould which it has formed, and will tolerate not the smallest wilful deviation from its rules, it is, and must be, odious in the eyes of the ungodly: "they love darkness rather than it; nor will they come to it, lest their deeds should be reprov'd."]

A just view of these things will prepare us for contemplating,

III. Their guilt and danger in rejecting it—

Doubtless every kind of sin will be a ground of "condemnation." But men's hatred of the light is that which chiefly, and above all other things,

1. Aggravates their guilt—

[The Gospel is a most wonderful provision for the salvation of fallen man. It is the brightest display of Divine wisdom, and the most stupendous effort of Divine goodness. The rejection of this therefore, especially as proceeding from a hatred of it, argues such a state of mind as no words can adequately express. The malignity of such a disposition rises in proportion to the excellence of the Gospel itself. We presume not to weigh the comparative guilt of men and devils, because the Scriptures have not given us sufficient grounds whereon to institute such a comparison: but the guilt of those who reject the Gospel far exceeds that of the heathen world: the wickedness of Tyre and Sidon, yea, of Sodom and Gomorrah, was not equal to that of the unbelieving Jews: nor was the guilt of those Jews, who rejected only the warnings of the prophets, comparable to that of those who despised the ministry of our Lord. In like manner, they who live under the meridian light of the Gospel in this day will have still more, if possible, to answer for, than the hearers of Christ himself; because his work and offices are now more fully exhibited, and more generally acknowledged. And in the day of judgment the Gospel will be as a millstone round the neck of those who rejected it: not having been a savour of life unto their salvation, it will be a savour of death unto their more aggravated condemnation.]

2. Insures their punishment—

[If men did not hate the Gospel itself, there would be some hope that they might in due time embrace it, and be converted by it. If they would even come to the light in order that the true quality of their works might be made manifest, then we might hope that they would be convinced of their wickedness, and be constrained to flee from the wrath to come. But when they dispute against the truth, and rack their invention in order to find out objections against it; when they indulge all manner of prejudices against the Gospel; when they withdraw themselves from the ministry of those who faithfully preach it, and say, as it were, to their minister, "Prophecy unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits;" what hope can there be of such persons? Their hearts are so hardened, that it is scarcely possible to make any impression upon them: if a ray of light do shine into their minds, they will endeavour to extinguish it as soon as possible; they will go to business, to pleasure, to company, yea, to intoxication itself,

in order to stifle the voice of conscience, and to recover their former delusive peace. Alas! they are not only perishing of a fatal disorder, but they reject with disdain the only remedy that can do them good: they therefore must die, because they persist in drinking of the poisonous cup that is in their hands, and dash from their lips the only antidote and cure.]

APPLICATION—

In so saying, thou reprovest us—

[Behold! we declare unto you, that light, even the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ, is now come into the world — — —

Ye *lovers of darkness*, reject not this blessed Gospel. Little can sin contribute to your happiness, even while you are most capable of tasting its pleasures: but what it can do for you in a dying hour, or in the day of judgment, it is needless for me to say. Let it not then keep you from coming to the light. Surely it is better that “your deeds should be reprov’d,” while you have opportunity to amend them, than that you should continue in them till you experience their bitter consequences. You would not travel in the dark when you could enjoy the light of day, or refuse the assistance of a guide that would lead you into the path which you professed to seek. Only then act for your souls as you would do in your temporal concerns, and all shall yet be well. Believe in Christ, and you shall yet be saved by him; as well from the commission of sin, as from the condemnation due to it.

Ye *who profess to love the light*, be careful to “walk as children of the light.” Bring every thing to the touchstone of God’s word. Try your spirit and temper, as well as your words and actions by this test. See whether you take the precepts of Christ as your rule, and his example as your pattern. For the sake of the world too, as well as for your own comfort, you should come continually to the light. If you would conciliate their regard for the Gospel, or remove their prejudice from yourselves, you should “*make your works manifest* that they are wrought in God.” You should let your light shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father that is in heaven.]

MDCXIII.

CONVERSION OF SOULS A GROUND OF JOY.

John iii. 29, 30. *He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.*

OF all the passions in the human breast, there is none more hateful than envy. When suffered to reign without controul, there is not any thing which it will not perpetrate. The rage of Cain, the conspiracy of Joseph's brethren, the implacable enmity of the Jewish priests against the Lord Jesus Christ, clearly shew to what cruelties it will impel those who are under its dominion. Doubtless in those who have the smallest degree of piety, this malignant principle is weakened, and in a measure subdued: but it is not eradicated: it is one of those corruptions, which, by varying their appearances, retain possession of us under the semblance of good: nor, till we have made very considerable advances in the divine life, are we able fully and effectually to guard against its deceitful workings. We are assured that Joshua was truly pious; yet from an envious zeal for his Master's honour he was desirous of silencing those who by divine inspiration prophesied in the camp^a. The Disciples of our Lord were actuated by no better principle, when they forbid a person to cast out devils in his name, because he did not follow with them^b. The complaint which John's disciples also made to him respecting the multitudes who submitted to the baptism of Jesus, originated in the same feeling. Some Jews had taken occasion, from Jesus re-baptizing the disciples of John, to represent John and Jesus as "opposing each other; and, from the difficulties of determining which of the two was right, they maintained, that it was better to adhere to the lustrations appointed by Moses, than to comply with

^a Numb. xi. 27—29.

^b Mark ix. 38.

the rites which these rival innovators were introducing. The disciples of John, fearing that their Master's credit would suffer, and his influence be subverted, come to him to complain of Jesus for usurping an authority that did not belong to him, and for undermining the authority of John, from whom, in fact, he had, as they thought, derived his influence. In answer to this complaint, John reminds them, that the very testimony which he had borne to Jesus, was sufficient to shew them their error: for he had from the beginning represented his own office as a short and temporary one, which was to cease, as soon as the attention of men should be turned to Him, whose forerunner he was: and consequently, that the accomplishment of this great object should be to them a source, not of pain and grief, but of gratitude and thanksgiving. This idea he illustrates by the similitude of a bridegroom delighting in his bride, and thereby exciting in his friends, not an envious repining, but a sympathetic joy. As for the diminution of his own influence, *this*, he tells them, was agreeable to the very design of his coming; and, like a star which had served its purpose in the night, he was contented to be eclipsed, now that the Sun of Righteousness had risen to illumine the world.

From this general view of our text, we observe,

I. That the conversion of souls to Christ is a ground of joy—

The success of a bridegroom who has obtained possession of his bride, is usually deemed a ground of joyful congratulation. Now the conversion of a soul to Christ is fitly represented under this similitude. The Scripture often speaks of him as the Husband of his people^c, and of the Church as his bride^d. To mark this correspondence, is needless: indeed, it is better to take it in a general view, than to attempt to trace it in particulars^e. Suffice it to say, that the

^c Isai. liv. 5. Hos. ii. 19, 20. ^d Eph. v. 23, 25—27, 31, 32.

^e The greatest delicacy should studiously be observed on all such subjects as these.

metaphor is just; that all who are truly converted give up themselves to Christ, and are thereby made partakers of all that he possesses.

Contemplate now what a ground of joy this is,

1. To the believer—

[Consider from what a state he is taken: how mean by nature! how vile by practice^f! — — — Consider to what a state he is raised: to what exalted honour! to what immense wealth! to what unspeakable felicity! — — — Has not such an one good reason to rejoice?]

2. To the heavenly Bridegroom—

[We know that, strictly speaking, he is not capable of having his happiness increased by any thing that we can do: he is altogether independent, and self-sufficient. Nevertheless, the Scriptures speak of him as still affected with joy and sorrow, just as he was in the days of his flesh. In conformity then with them, let us think, what must be his feelings, when he sees the blessed ends of his incarnation and death accomplished! — — — To convert and save sinners was the end of all that he did and suffered for us; and when he beholds them converted to himself, “he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied^g.” To illustrate this idea, he gives us a variety of parables^h; yea, he condescends to use by the prophet the very similitude in the text, in order to express the satisfaction of his soul in such eventsⁱ! — — —]

3. To the Bridegroom’s friend—

[As the friends both of the bride and bridegroom are often accessory to their union, and rejoice when they see the wishes of all the parties accomplished, so the friends of Christ, his ministers especially, exert themselves to bring sinners unto him. It is for this they labour, for this they pray; yea, for this they live, and for this they are content to die. Their one object is, that sinners may be born to God, and be united to Christ in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. In the pursuit of this, their labours, their anxieties, their sufferings are great — — — Can they then do otherwise than rejoice, when they see that they have not “laboured in vain or run in vain?” If they “travail, as it were, in birth, whilst they stand in doubt,” must they not rejoice, when their doubts are all dispelled?

^f Ezekiel through the whole 16th chapter strongly describes this. but the foregoing caution must not be forgotten in following his train of ideas.

^g Isai. liii. 11.

^h Luke xv. 5, 6, 9, 10, 23, 24.

ⁱ Isai. lxii. 5.

See how Paul rejoiced in the conversion of men^k: and such are the feelings of every minister, in proportion as he is animated with Christian zeal and love — — —]

Whilst the Baptist thus disinterestedly declares that the conversion of sinners to Christ was to him a source of joy, he predicts,

II. That it shall advance in despite of every obstacle—

Those who are the instruments of diffusing the knowledge of Christ must wax and wane: however distinguished they may be for a time, they must soon “decrease.” But Christ, and his interests, must “increase.”

He must increase,

1. In the estimation of his chosen people—

[The envy of some, and the malignity of others, will be exerted to damp the ardour of our affections, and to shake our fidelity towards him: and, where a profession of regard for him has been lightly taken up, the enemies of Christ will succeed in drawing us from our allegiance to him. But, if we “have received the grace of God in truth,” we shall never yield to their solicitations: and, “if any go out from us, it is because they were not of us: for, if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us^l.” The true Spouse of Christ may be tried and tempted; but she will never renounce her connexion with him, or be unfaithful to her engagements. The more she is assaulted from without or from within, the more she will flee to him for succour: and her experience of his kindness will endear him to her ever more and more; so that her love to him will be more ardent, her affiance in him more uniform, and her adherence to him more determined. Never will he be more dear to her, than when she has suffered the loss of all things for him. The language of her heart will be, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee:” and “all other things will be counted but dross and dung in comparison of the knowledge of him.” In short, she will “grow in grace, as she grows in the knowledge” of her Divine Husband — — —]

2. In the estimation of the world at large—

[The Baptist's words were soon verified: for, in the space of a few years, the knowledge and love of Christ were diffused throughout all the Roman empire. But his influence is yet only in its commencement. There is a time coming when it

^k 1 Thess. iii. 7—10.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 19.

will extend to the remotest corners of the earth: "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall do him service." "All shall know him, from the least unto the greatest;" and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord" — — — "Then shall his Wife have made herself ready, and the marriage of the Lamb shall come: and blessed indeed will they be who shall then be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb^m." This is "the increase" which we assuredly look for; and of it there shall be no endⁿ."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who profess to desire an union with Christ—

[Happy they who feel a desire after him! — — — But there must be in every one of us a meetness for him, before he will acknowledge us as his. Let not this however be misunderstood. There cannot be in us any thing that can *deserve* his love, nor any thing that shall *induce him* to set his love upon us: we have not a good thought or desire which has not been first of all given us by him. But still, if we would be his in deed and in truth, we must have our desires supremely fixed on him, and every adulterous affection mortified. It is not a divided heart that he will accept: we must give ourselves wholly to him; or he will never admit us into the relation of his Spouse. See what holy jealousy St. Paul manifested on this head; and with what tender concern he urged the consideration of this subject on his Corinthian converts^o — — — So, beloved, we would urge it upon you. Deceive not your own souls. In forming human connexions, we may impose upon one another: but we can never impose on him: and if we would be acknowledged by him as his bride, we must present ourselves to him as a chaste virgin, with a determination to be his, even his alone — — —]

2. Those who profess to be actually united to him—

[It is scarcely needful to say, that you must endeavour to "walk worthy of your high calling." If you profess to stand in such a relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, "what manner of persons ought you to be in all manner of conversation and godliness!" See then that you live in a state of constant communion with him^p, and of entire dependence on him^q — — — Be zealous for his honour, and studious to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory^r — — —

^m Rev. xix. 7—9. and xxi. 9—11.

ⁿ Isai. ix. 7. Dan. ii. 44. and vii. 27.

^o 2 Cor. xi. 2 3.

^p 1 John i. 3. ^q 1 Cor. i. 30. John i. 16.

^r Rom. viii. 2.

Endeavour also to commend him unto others. There is no room for jealousy here. The light of his countenance, like the light of the sun, will not be the less enjoyed by you because it is imparted to others: on the contrary, the more successful you are in bringing others into a participation of his benefits, the more will your own souls overflow with joy. And the very weakest amongst us, that is really the Bridegroom's friend, shall find that he does not testify of Christ in vain: however incapable he may feel himself to recommend the Saviour to others, he shall see some fruit of his labour, and have reason to say, with John, "This my joy is fulfilled."]

MDCXIV.

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

John iii. 36. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

A FAITHFUL minister will find many occasions of rectifying the views and dispositions of his hearers; nor will he fail to improve the opportunities that occur of leading them to a more intimate acquaintance with their Lord. Some of the followers of John the Baptist having heard of the popularity of Jesus, were envious of his success, and jealous for the honour of their own teacher. But this holy man answered their complaints with much wisdom and humility; and having, in the strongest terms, given his testimony to the Divine mission of Jesus, he confirmed his word with the solemn declaration which we have just read. This record contains the sum and substance of the Gospel. It sets before us,

I. The one condition of our salvation—

We do not mean to say that there is any thing to be done, whereby we are to *earn* or *merit* heaven (in this respect our salvation has no conditions except those which were performed by Christ) but that,

We must believe in Christ in order to obtain salvation—

[The duty here enjoined is not so easy as men generally suppose. If it merely imported a consent to the truth of

Christianity, it might then be performed without any difficulty or self-denial. But to "believe on the Son of God" is, to believe, that he is the only, and the all-sufficient, Saviour of our ruined race. If we do not feel our need of him; if we be not convinced that we can never obtain salvation by any works of our own; if we do not make earnest application to him at a throne of grace; and if we do not trust altogether in his blood and righteousness, we cannot believe aright. This, and nothing less than this, is the condition of our acceptance with God.]

Nor is there any other condition so suitable as this—

[We may be ready to think that the performance of good works were a much fitter condition than faith. But if salvation were by works, no flesh living could be saved; because no man ever has kept, or ever can keep, the whole law of God. Nor should we be at all more safe, if *sincere* obedience were the term of our acceptance; because as no man has perfectly fulfilled the law, so no man has done all that he might have done; in many instances we might have mortified our sinful dispositions more, and approved ourselves more diligent in the discharge of our duty. Besides, if we were saved by any works of our own, we should have whereof to glory, and might ascribe, even in heaven itself, the honour to ourselves. Whereas the appointment of salvation by faith secures happiness to the most unworthy, if really penitent; and necessitates all to give the glory of their salvation to God alone.]

The Baptist having thus made known the condition of our acceptance with God, proceeds to declare,

II. The state of those who comply with it—

About this, which might have been thought a dubious point, no doubt whatever is expressed. The believer has,

1. A title to eternal life—

[There is not any title whatever to an earthly inheritance so secure as that which the believer has to heaven. He has the promise of Jehovah. He has a covenant sealed with Emmanuel's blood, and confirmed with the oath of God himself—and, provided he can appeal to God respecting his unfeigned reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, he may put in his claim even at the bar of judgment, and demand, if we may so speak, all the glory of heaven as his unalienable inheritance. God hath said, "He that believeth shall be saved;" and if we only prove our performance of the condition, we need never doubt the fulfilment of God's promise.]

2. The beginning and earnest of it in his soul—

[The life which a believer has in his soul is of the same kind with that which he shall possess for ever. He has the same reconciliation with God, the same delight in him, and the same sense of his favour. The Spirit of God that is within him is often called “an earnest” of his inheritance; because that Spirit, in his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences, is a foretaste of heaven, and a pledge, that the soul possessed of it shall in due time enjoy all the glory and felicity of the heavenly world. He has only to wait the appointed hour, and his abode shall be in the presence of his God, where nothing that can trouble or defile him shall ever enter. Say, brethren, could an angel from heaven announce to you more joyful tidings than these?]

But it is not thus with all. Widely different is,

III. The state of those who do not comply with it—

Here we may observe the same strength of assertion as in the former case. The text positively affirms, that

They shall not enter into heaven—

[Unbelievers often seem as confident of obtaining eternal happiness as if all the promises of God had been made to them in particular. But they will be awfully disappointed as soon as ever they enter into the invisible world. “They will knock at the gate of heaven, crying, Lord, Lord, open to us: but he will answer them, Depart from me, I never knew you.” A flaming sword will prohibit their entrance into Paradise, and an impassable gulf be fixed between them and the celestial spirits. This is the declaration of God, nor can it ever be reversed.]

They shall be made eternal monuments of God’s wrath—

[They will not be persuaded that God is angry with them; and because they feel not his judgments now, they think they never shall. But God even now is filled with wrath against them; and they are preserved only as condemned criminals in a dungeon, till the hour appointed for their execution shall arrive. God’s eye is ever upon them, not for good, but for evil. He views them as guilty of the most flagrant disobedience*. He regards them as contemners both of his majesty, and of his mercy. He is incensed against them for “trampling under foot his dear Son, and doing despite to his Spirit.” And soon

* *ὁ θεὸς ἀπειθεῖν* is contrasted in the text with *ὁ πιστεύων*.

the wrath, which even now “abideth on them,” “shall come upon them to the uttermost.”]

APPLICATION—

[Let all inquire seriously whether they do indeed believe — — — Let those, who have not hitherto come to Christ as lost and perishing sinners, guard against those workings of self-righteousness which would keep them from him — — — And let “those who have believed be careful to maintain good works” — — —]

MDCXV.

CHRIST A FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER.

John iv. 10. *Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*

OUR blessed Saviour, though “Lord of all,” was a man like unto us in all things, sin only excepted: he hungered, he thirsted, he was weary. He put forth his Almighty power to heal the maladies of others; but would not exercise it for the exempting of himself from human infirmities. In journeying from Judæa to Galilee, he was overcome with weariness; and was necessitated to ask, from a woman of Samaria, who was come to the well by which he was sitting, a draught of water to quench his thirst. I conceive that, from the beginning, his object in addressing her was more to impart good to her, than to obtain relief to himself: for, instead of noticing, as he might well have done, her backwardness to comply with his request, he lost not a moment in revealing himself to her, as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

From his address to her, we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The characters under which our Lord here presents himself to our view:

1. He first speaks of himself as “the great Gift of God” to mankind—

[Such indeed he was. In comparison of HIM, all other gifts are as nothing; nothing, in respect of internal worth; and nothing, in respect of the benefits accruing from them. He is no other than "Jehovah's Fellow." Yet to such a degree did God love the world, that he gave HIM, even his only-begotten Son, to become a man for us. Nor was it to instruct us only that God sent his Son, but to *save* us; to save us by bearing our iniquities in his own body on the cross; and by working out a righteousness, whereby we might be justified, and find acceptance with him. No other gift that God was able to bestow was of equal value with this, or could have effected this great end. Well, therefore, may all other gifts vanish from our sight before him, as the stars are eclipsed by the noon-day sun: and well may He, by way of eminence, be called "*The gift of God.*"]

2. The Fountain of all good—

[Little did this woman think who it was that thus addressed her. He appeared to be a mere man, needing a little water to quench his thirst: but he was indeed "the fountain of living waters^a," the one only source of good to a ruined world. By "living water" we understand all the blessings of salvation; "all fulness" of which is treasured up in him at this moment: and "out of his fulness may every sinner in the universe receive."]

Our Saviour's address to her yet further shews us,

II. The benefits which will accrue to us from the knowledge of him—

If once we get a just view of his character,

1. We shall surely apply to him for his benefits—

[If temporal blessings, however great in value, were spread before us, we might conceive of their being beheld with indifference: a conviction of their emptiness might well raise our minds above them, so that we would not condescend even to ask for a participation of them. But can all the blessings of grace and glory be contemplated with indifference? Can we behold an inexhaustible treasure of them laid up expressly for us, and not desire them? No: it would be impossible; especially if we knew that they were all to be obtained by asking. To every creature under heaven may our Lord justly say, "If thou knewest what I have to bestow, thou wouldest ask of me." We may as well suppose hell to be opened to our view, without calling forth a desire to escape it; and heaven; without creating a desire to obtain it; as imagine a view of

^a Jer. i. 13.

Christ, under the foregoing characters, to be disclosed to the soul, and no desire to be excited there for the enjoyment of his blessings.]

2. We shall infallibly be made partakers of them—

[Not even the Samaritan woman, stranger as she was, and profligate, should have solicited his favour without obtaining it: much less shall any person *now* be suffered to seek his face in vain. He says to all, "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Nor would he have us straitened in our requests: his promise to the trembling suppliant is, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Nothing would be too great for him to give, if only we sought him in humility and faith. Pardon, peace, holiness, and glory, should all be poured into our souls in rich abundance; yea, "his Spirit, which he would give us, should be within us a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life."]

Know then, all of you,

1. That the Lord Jesus Christ is here present with you—

[We see him not corporeally, as the Samaritan woman did: nevertheless, he is spiritually present with us, as he has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world;" and, if you will seek communion with him, you shall not be disappointed of your hope. He is, in reality, the same as ever he was. Still is he the great gift of God to man. Still is he the fountain of all spiritual good. Still does he complain of our forgetfulness of him, and declare he will impart out of his fulness to every inquiring soul. He put the Samaritan woman upon asking of him; saying, in fact, "Ask of me." So says he now to every one of us, "Ask of me, and I will give you living water."]

2. That you, no less than the poor Samaritan, need the blessings which he offers—

[Which of you needs them not? Which of you can find any other fountain from whence to quench your thirst? Which of you will not one day bitterly lament that you lost the present opportunity? I pray you, then, avail yourselves of your Lord's present condescension and grace; and let your souls take of him, and live for ever.]

MDCXVI.

THE LIVING WATER.

John iv. 14. *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

OUR Lord invites us to learn of him. To encourage us, he declares that he is meek and lowly in heart. Never was this disposition more displayed than in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. She was of the most abandoned character; yet he condescended to instruct her. And, when she slighted his proffered mercies, endeavoured to recommend them to her more favourable acceptance. We shall consider,

I. What is that water which Christ will give—

The woman understood our Lord only in a literal sense. But in his words there was a mystical meaning. By the water which he offered her, he meant the Holy Ghost—

[The Holy Spirit is often represented in the Scriptures under the figure of water. It is he of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks when he says, that God will pour out water upon thirsty souls^a. Ezekiel also explains himself as referring to him, when he promises to the Church, in Jehovah's name, that clean water should be sprinkled on them to cleanse them from their pollutions^b. We are taught by God himself to put this interpretation on similar expressions used by our blessed Lord^c. By the help of these passages we ascertain beyond a doubt the import of that before us.]

This water he had full authority to give—

[Jesus had not received the Spirit by measure only, like other prophets^d: he had the residue of the Spirit abiding in him^e; yea, he had all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily^f. As mediator he was commissioned and empowered to bestow this Spirit^g. Hence he frequently

^a Isai. xlv. 3. ^b Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. ^c John vii. 37—39.

^d John iii. 34. ^e Mal. ii. 15. ^f Col. i. 19. and ii. 9.

^g Ps. lxxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8. and Acts ii. 33. He received in order that he might give.

arrogated to himself this power^b. He actually exerted it while he continued upon earthⁱ; and in a more abundant measure after his exaltation to heaven. The effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is expressly ascribed to him^k. Hence we may understand why the Holy Ghost is so emphatically called *the Spirit of Christ*^l.]

To excite her desire after it, he proceeded to set before her,

II. The properties it possesses—

Contrasting it with that which he had solicited at her hands, he told her it was,

1. Satisfying in its nature—

[Water from an earthly spring will quench the thirst only for a short time; nor will it at all allay our appetite for other things. The men of this world are insatiable in their desire after the vanities of time and sense. The more they have of pleasure, riches, or honour, the more they want^m. But a draught of this living water will satisfy the soul: of this heavenly spring indeed, all who have once tasted, will wish to drink again; yea, they will pant after it as the hart after the water-brooks. But their desire of earthly things will be greatly abated. The consolations of the Spirit will be regarded by them as the only satisfying portionⁿ: they will make every thing else appear insipid, as the beholding of the meridian sun will obscure in their eyes the splendour of all inferior objects^o.]

2. Heavenly in its tendency—

[The supplies of water in “a well” are constant and uniform: so the Spirit operates in the heart of man. There will indeed be seasons when his operations will be less manifest: but he will always reside in us as a principle of life^p: he will excite holy and heavenly affections in our breasts^q: he will keep heaven itself in our view^r: and the one aim of all his motions will be to lead us to everlasting life: nor, if we cherish his motions, will he fail of bringing us to the possession of it^s.]

INFER—

1. How glorious a person must Christ be!

^b *Thrice* did he claim this authority in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, and often afterwards in the plainest terms. John xv. 26. and xvi. 7, 14.

ⁱ John xx. 22.

^k Acts ii. 33. before cited.

^l 1 Pet. i. 11.

^m Job xx. 22.

ⁿ Isai. lv. 2.

^o Ps. lxxiii. 25. Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^p John xiv. 16, 17.

^q Gal. iv. 6.

^r Eph. i. 14.

^s Rom. viii. 13, 14.

[The Holy Spirit is God equal with the Father^t: yet Christ has power to send him into our hearts. He can as easily bestow him on us, as we can give a cup of water from a spring. Even though the whole world should ask him, he could impart the Spirit to all of them at the same instant^u. Let us then entertain worthy thoughts of him, and look to him for constant supplies of this living water^x.]

2. How earnest should we be in our application for this heavenly gift!

[The worldly man is indefatigable in his pursuit of earthly vanities: but which of them can be compared with this living water? Which of them can give us life? or satisfy the soul? or bring us to glory? O that we might thirst after this, and this alone! Then would the invitations of Christ be precious to our souls^y, and we should speedily receive his promised blessings^z.]

3. How dead ought we to be to all earthly things!

[Our Lord represents all who have received his Spirit as thirsting no more. Hence we can have no evidence that we have drunk of the living waters, but in proportion as our thirst for other things is abated. Let those, who profess to have the Spirit dwelling in them, consider this. The Scriptures that confirm this truth are numberless^a. May God impress them deeply on our hearts! Let the world then be crucified unto us, and us unto the world^b: and if we would indeed be found partakers of Christ, let us both live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit^c.]

^t Acts v. 3, 4.

^u John vii. 37—39. Isai. lv. 2.

^x Phil. i. 19. and John i. 16.

^y Rev. xxii. 17.

^z Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^a Jam. iv. 4. John ii. 15—17. Rom. viii. 9.

^b Gal. vi. 14.

^c Gal. v. 24, 25.

MDCXVII.

SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS.

John iv. 22. *Salvation is of the Jews.*

THIS is part of the answer of our blessed Lord to the Samaritan woman. He had taken occasion, from an observation of hers, to shew her that he was well acquainted with the most secret history of her past life; and not from report merely, but from his own omniscient mind, from which nothing could be hid.

He had told her, that “ she had had five husbands ;” (all of whom, it is probable, had put her away for her adulteries ;) and that “ the person with whom she was now living was not her husband.” She, wishing to get rid of so painful a subject, proposed a question relative to a controversy which then existed between the Samaritans and the Jews, as to the place where God was to be worshipped. Our Lord, satisfied with having discovered to her his character as a prophet of the Most High, graciously waved the prosecution of a subject which was so painful to her, and turned his attention to that which she had submitted to him. In reply to her question, he informed her, that the time was coming when all distinctions of places should be lost ; so far, at least, as related to acceptable worship : for that all, of whatever place or country, who should worship God in spirit and in truth, should be accepted of him. At the same time he informed her that the question itself must be determined in favour of the Jews. The Samaritans, indeed, had much to say in their own behalf, and in support of the cause which they maintained. They could say, that on Mount Gerizim, for the sanctity of which they pleaded, Abraham himself had built an altar^a, as had Jacob also ; (for Sichem, or Shechem, where he built it, was so close to Mount Gerizim, that a man’s voice might be distinctly heard from the one to the other^b :) and that, consequently, that place had a prior claim to Zion, on which no altar had been raised, till many hundred years had elapsed. They could also with truth affirm, that Moses himself, under the special direction of Jehovah, had commanded, that all the congregations of Israel, as soon as they should gain possession of the Promised Land, should assemble round Mount Gerizim ; and that from thence the blessings of Jehovah should be pronounced, whilst his curses should be declared from Mount Ebal, which was near to it^c. They could also appeal to the Jewish Scriptures, that Joshua and all Israel

^a Gen. xii. 6, 7.

^b Gen. xxxiii. 18—20. with Judg. ix. 7.

^c Deut. xi. 29. and xxvii. 11—13.

had actually complied with this command^a; and had thereby sanctified that mountain in a more especial manner, and marked it out as the place which God had chosen for his more peculiar worship in all future ages.

But, in answer to all this, our Lord informed her, that the Samaritans “knew not whom they worshipped.” Though they occupied the land of Israel, they were not Israelites, but foreigners, whom the king of Assyria had sent to occupy the land, when he carried captive the ten tribes of Israel^c. Nor did they, in reality, know the true God: for it was only in consequence of the judgments which God had inflicted on them for their idolatries, by sending lions to devour them, that they had ever thought of worshipping him at all. To avert his displeasure, they had desired that a Jewish priest might be sent back to the land, to instruct them how to worship Jehovah; but, at the same time, they retained their own idolatries; thus “fearing the Lord, and serving other Gods^d.” The Jews, on the contrary, worshipped Jehovah alone; (for never after the Babylonish captivity did they return to idolatry;) and they possessed that revelation of God’s will, through the knowledge of which alone any human being could be saved: “Ye worship ye know not what: *we* know what *we* worship; for salvation is of the Jews.”

Thus was the controversy determined in favour of the Jews. But that being no longer of any consequence to the Church, we forbear to notice it any further; and shall fix our attention on that general declaration, which is still of as great importance as ever, that “salvation is of the Jews.”

It is of them *originally*, as *derived from them*; and it is of them *instrumentally*, as *communicated altogether by them*.

I. It is of the Jews, as being originally derived from them—

The way of salvation has been one and the same,

^a Josh. viii. 33, 34.

^c 2 Kings xvii. 24.

^d 2 Kings xvii. 25—27.

from the very moment that the promise was given in Paradise, that "the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." But, having been only traditionally handed down, it was but very imperfectly known, even in the family of Abraham; and by the world at large it was almost, if not entirely, forgotten. But it pleased God, when he brought out from their bondage in Egypt the descendants of Abraham, to give them a written revelation of his will, and to make known to them the way of salvation, *not only in its great leading article*, the sacrifice of Christ, *but in many minute particulars*, as we shall see by an investigation of their Ceremonial Law.

The Jewish religion, so far as the way of salvation was concerned, was founded altogether on sacrifice. No person could approach unto God without a sacrifice: but by means of sacrifices specially appointed, every one might hope to obtain forgiveness of sin, and acceptance with his reconciled God. For this end there were sacrifices offered every morning and every evening throughout the year; and on the Sabbath-day they were doubled^a: but on the great day of annual atonement they were multiplied, with the most significant rites that can be imagined. The high priest was to take the blood of the sacrifices, and to carry it within the vail, and to sprinkle it upon the Mercy-seat, and before the Mercy-seat, in token that the hopes of all Israel were founded upon the sacrifices thus offered as an atonement for their sins^b. After that was done, he was to offer incense, and then to come out and bless the people.

But, as has been observed, there were many peculiar ordinances appointed for their instruction, as to the more minute points to be attended to in this great work. On some occasions, the offenders themselves were to lay their hands upon the head of their sacrifices: on some, the blood of the sacrifices was to be sprinkled on the offerers: on some the blood was to be sprinkled, mixed with water^c. And *the efficacy of*

^a Numb. xxviii. 3, 4, 9, 10. ^b Lev. xvi. 14.

^c Lev. xiv. 6, 7. Heb. ix. 19.

all these offerings was pre-eminently marked in the ordinance of the scape-goat. One goat having been killed, and its blood carried within the vail, another goat, called the scape-goat, which had been chosen by lot for this purpose, was brought forth, and had all the sins of all the Children of Israel laid upon it by the hands of the High Priest; and it was then led, with all the guilt of Israel upon its head, into the wilderness, never more to be seen by man; that so all the people might see that their iniquities were taken away, and that the punishment due to them should not be inflicted.

Now, all this was designed to shadow forth to that people the way of salvation. And, in truth, to those who had any spiritual discernment, salvation was exhibited with a clearness quite sufficient for the circumstances under which the people were. They were children; and were to be taught like children, by types and shadows: and all who looked through those types to the sacrifice which they shadowed forth, were saved as effectually as we are by looking back upon the offering which has now been once offered upon Calvary.

In all this was Christianity depicted. On what are the hopes of Christians founded, but on sacrifice, even the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ? Except through his atoning blood, not a creature in the universe can ever come to God. In presenting that offering, he himself was the Priest, as well as the victim: and having offered himself up to God upon the cross, he rose from the dead, and went with his own blood within the vail, there to present it before the Mercy-seat: and on that he founds his all-prevailing intercession.

But, let us come to a few particulars, and we shall see how the light beams upon us from every part of the Jewish Scriptures. We have said, that, on some occasions, the offender laid his hands upon the head of his offering, just as Aaron did on the scape-goat, when he confessed over him all the sins of all the Children of Israel. And this teaches us, that it is not sufficient for us that the Lord Jesus Christ has been

offered for our sins : we must go to him : we must confess over him, as it were, our sins : and we must by faith transfer to him our guilt, and declare before God, that we have no hope whatever but in his atoning blood. It has been said also, that on some occasions, the offerer was sprinkled with the blood of his offering : and this, also, must we do ; taking, as it were, the bunch of hyssop in our hands, and dipping it in the Redeemer's blood, and sprinkling our own souls with it, as the only possible means of purging our consciences from guilt, and of bringing us into a state of peace with God. It is in reference to this that we are said to "have come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel." The sacrifice of Abel received, indeed, a sweet token of God's favourable acceptance ; but the blood of our sacrifice washes all our sins away, and gives us a title to an everlasting inheritance.

It has been observed, that, on some occasions, the blood was mixed with water, and then sprinkled on the offerer. This shews us, that we must have the Holy Spirit also poured out upon us : according as it is said, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean ; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you." The Lord Jesus Christ, we are told, "came not by water only, but by water and blood : " and this very mystery was intimated at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion, when the soldier pierced our Saviour's side, and forthwith came, in two distinguishable streams, blood and water : the one to cleanse us from the guilt of sin ; the other, from its power : according as it is written, "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

We might prosecute this subject in a great variety of particulars, and shew in all of them the correspondence between the salvation shadowed forth by the law, and that exhibited by the Gospel. But we wish to keep the subject as simple as possible, and not to perplex it by too great a variety. There is, however, one point which it is of great importance

to mention. It will be remembered, that, when Moses was about to make the tabernacle, a very strict and solemn command was given him, (the injunction is repeatedly mentioned in the Pentateuch,) "See thou make all things according to the pattern shewn to thee in the mount." The same injunction was given to David, also, when he was desirous to build the temple. And St. Paul very particularly notices the former, as of vast importance. But whence was it that such stress was laid on this apparently unimportant matter? It was from hence: The law was given to shadow forth the Gospel: and it was to be the model to which the whole edifice of Christianity was to be conformed, in every the minutest particular. Now, if there was any one thing added to the tabernacle, or omitted in it, or altered in any respect, it would not be a perfect representation of Christianity. But the two were to correspond with each other, as the impression with the seal: and if there were any thing in the tabernacle superfluous or defective, the correspondence would be lost, and God would be greatly dishonoured. But the necessary care was taken: Moses was faithful in all his house as a Servant, *for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after*: and the same fidelity has Christ shewn as a Son, whose house are we, if we "hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end."

Thus it appears that we have received salvation *originally* from the Jews; to whom, in every particular, it was first revealed. But we go on to observe, 2dly, That we have also received it *instrumentally* from them, in that it has been altogether communicated to us through their ministrations.

It was first preached to us by Moses and the prophets. We had known nothing of a Messiah, if they had not pointed him out. We have already seen how much we are indebted to Moses for his writings: which make known to us the very first prophecy of a Saviour; and shew us how Abel, and Noah, and Abraham, found acceptance with God. To him we owe it, that the model shewn to him in the mount

was so carefully copied, that there is not so much as a pin in his tabernacle which has not its corresponding article in the Christian Edifice. From him we have such a view of Christianity as the Gospel itself can scarcely be said to afford. Doubtless, till the ceremonies prescribed by him had the true light reflected on them, they were very obscure : but now that they have been explained to us from above, we see the Gospel embodied, as it were, and made visible even to the eye of sense. Who that contemplates one goat offered in sacrifice to God, and the other bearing away all the sins of all the people of Israel that had been laid upon his head, does not see, before his very face, what the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is daily effecting for all that believe in him ? Even the moral law itself, which Moses also has recorded, has the very same tendency, and, in the ears of all who understand it, proclaims the utter impossibility of being saved, except by the sacrifice that should in due time be offered ; insomuch that St. Paul calls it “ a school-master, to bring us to Christ.” All the prophets concur with him in the very same testimony ; and proclaim with one voice, that “ there is no remission of sins but by blood ;” and that “ there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.” We are told, that “ to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” Ask we of Isaiah ? His testimony is, “ He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and by his stripes we are healed.” To the same effect speaks also the Prophet Daniel : “ Messiah shall be cut off ; but not for himself.” “ He shall make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.” And Joel points him out, as “ that Lord, on whom whosoever shall call, shall be saved.”

The last and greatest of all the prophets was John the Baptist : and he pointed out the very Saviour himself in these emphatic words ; “ Behold the Lamb

of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Here we see the union of the law and of the Gospel to be precisely such as we have represented it. The lamb was at that very time offered every morning and evening in sacrifice to God for the sins of Israel; and here was Jesus pointed out as the Lamb that should take away, not the sins of one people only, but of the whole world.

And what was the testimony borne by our Lord himself? Did he not declare, that He was come to "give his life a ransom for many?" Did He not, when he administered the sacramental cup to his Disciples, say, "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins?"

But what said his Apostles, when the time was come for the full disclosure of the great mystery of Redemption? They with one voice declare, that "he died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" that we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; and that "all who believe in him are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." In the Epistle to the Hebrews the parallel between the law and the Gospel is distinctly drawn; so that nothing is left to fancy or conjecture; but all is declared on infallible authority to have been accomplished in him, to the unspeakable advantage of our souls; since, "if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the Living God."

And to whom are we indebted for all this knowledge? To Jews, from first to last: to Jewish prophets and to Jewish Apostles: yea, the very Saviour himself who effected this salvation, and to whom they all bare witness; he himself proclaimed it; he himself displayed its power whilst he yet hanged on the cross; and after his resurrection he gave this commission to

his Disciples, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: and he that believeth not, shall be damned."

Now, what of all these things can we learn from the philosophers of Greece and Rome? No more than from the beasts themselves. It was hidden from them altogether. If we want to know what kind of a Saviour was to come, we must learn it from Jews. If we would know what ground there is to believe that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies; to Jews we must go, to obtain the desired information. If we would learn how we are to come to the Saviour, and to obtain acceptance through him; we must sit at the feet of Jews, and receive instruction from their lips. We have not a hope that is not founded on their word; nor can a ray of consolation shine into our souls, that is not emitted from their writings. We do not sufficiently consider this: but we ought never to forget how greatly we are indebted to the Jews: since, whether in its primary structure or its subsequent conveyance, our "salvation is altogether of them;" of them originally, of them instrumentally, of them exclusively: so that not a soul amongst us shall ever go forth from this devoted land to the mountains of eternal bliss, but as instructed, instigated, and assisted by a Jew.

From this subject we cannot but learn our duty in two important respects: first, to seek this salvation for ourselves; and next, to exert ourselves in order to impart this salvation to those from whom we have received it.

First, then, let us seek this salvation for ourselves.

It cannot be that Almighty God should have done so much for our salvation, and we be at liberty to neglect it. The Apostle's question is full of awful and impressive energy, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" Surely, if God has given his only dear Son to be a sacrifice for sin; if, in order to prepare the world for the reception of him, he shadowed forth all his work and offices with such

precision, that it should be impossible for any considerate mind not to see and understand the way of salvation ; if Prophets and Apostles, for such a series of ages, bare witness to him at the peril of their lives, in order that we might know him, and be partakers of his benefits ; does it become us to despise it all, as if it were no better than a cunningly-devised fable ? Surely, we must see that it is our bounden duty to flee for refuge to this hope that is set before us. We must remember what the very term " Salvation " implies : it implies, that we are lost : for if in ourselves we be not lost, we cannot need a Saviour. But we are lost, every one of us ; for we are sinners, condemned by God's righteous law ; and " the wrath of God abideth on us." I fear it will appear harsh to say, that we are in this respect on a footing with the fallen angels, even with " the spirits that are already in the prison " of hell. But, if I say the truth before God, this is the only difference between them and us : *they* are lost beyond redemption ; whereas *we*, though lost, have salvation offered to us : but, if we neglect this salvation, we shall perish, under a load of guilt beyond all expression aggravated, and under a punishment beyond all conception terrible. Whatever may have been the guilt of the fallen angels, from this, at least, they are free ; they have never poured contempt on a redeeming God, never rejected a proffered salvation : but these are the sins that will be charged on us, if we embrace not the salvation which is revealed to us in the Gospel.

I say, then, to every soul before me, seek this salvation which the Jews have brought unto you : seek it *simply*, mixing nothing with it, but relying altogether on the atoning blood of Christ, " who, though he knew no sin, was made sin for you, that you, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him." And seek it *humbly*, confessing over the Lord Jesus Christ your every sin, and transferring it by faith to his sacred head. In point of dependence, you must renounce your most righteous acts as much as your vilest sins ; and you

must look to his blood to cleanse you from the iniquity even of your holiest things. Seek it *constantly* too: it was every day in the year that the offerings for sin were made: and every day and hour must you look to your great Sacrifice, if you would have it available for your eternal good. Seek it, moreover, *unreservedly*. Neglect not the water, any more than the blood. It will be a fatal mistake to think of ever being saved by the sacrifice of Christ, if you be not renewed and sanctified by his Spirit. These two are inseparably joined by God himself; and it will be at the peril of your souls, if ever you attempt to put them asunder. Lastly, I would say, seek it *to the full extent of your necessities*. I have purposely deferred till now all mention of the sacrifices that were appointed for the sins of ignorance. They are particularly stated in the fourth chapter of the Book of Leviticus. There you will see, that, if a man had ever so ignorantly and unintentionally contracted defilement, (say, by the touching of a bone or a grave, or any thing that had been previously touched by one unclean,) he must bring his offering, as soon as ever he discovered that he had transgressed: and, if he should refuse to bring his appointed offering, he must be cut off from the Lord's people, as a despiser of the law, and a rebel against his God. Thus must we do, even for the slightest inadvertence or defect. And if, from an idea that our offence has been light and venial, we hope to remove its guilt by any other means than the blood of Christ, we shall surely perish. If we had never violated God's holy law but once, and that only by an inadvertent thought, there remains for us but one way of salvation, one only door of hope: and, if we will not enter at that door, and walk in that way, "there remains nothing for us but a certain fearful looking-for of wrath and fiery indignation to consume us." I say then, again, to every soul amongst you, seek for salvation in Christ alone. There was but one brazen serpent erected in the camp of Israel: and there is but one Saviour appointed for the whole

world. "There is no other way unto the Father but by Him:" but "those who come to God in his Son's name, he will in no wise cast out."

Next, let us exert ourselves to impart this salvation to those from whom we have received it. I appeal to all: if we are so indebted to the Jewish people of former ages, should we not endeavour, in some respect, to requite them by shewing kindness to their descendants? and if we are constrained to say that "salvation is of the Jews," should we not, now that the Jews themselves are ignorant of that salvation, endeavour to impart to them the light which we enjoy, and constrain them, in their turn, to say, "Salvation is of the Christians?" For, surely, if it be of *them* in its *commencement*, it is, and ought to be, of *us* in its *progress and consummation*. And I would ask, is it not a scandal to the whole Christian world, that they should have so long and so shamefully neglected those to whose ancestors they are so greatly indebted? It was never God's design that we should "hide our candle under a bushel," and conceal it from the very persons who have put it into our hands. On the contrary, St. Paul expressly says, that as *we* have been benefited by their unbelief, so we should strive to benefit *them* by our faith: "As we in times past have not believed God, but *have now obtained mercy through their unbelief*; so have these also now not believed, that *through our mercy they also may obtain mercy*." Whilst, therefore, we withhold from them the instruction which God has qualified us to impart, we defeat the very designs of God himself, and may well have required at our hands the blood of all who perish through our neglect.

If we would know in what way we ought to exert ourselves for them, we need only inquire how they exerted themselves for us. Behold the Prophets and Apostles, in the different ages in which they lived: which of them all, with the exception of the Prophet Jonah, did not engage in his work with zeal, and execute it with fidelity? Of all the Apostles, there was but one who did not actually seal the truth with

his blood; as John also was willing to do, if he had been called to it. And all the first Christian converts, when driven from Jerusalem, "went everywhere preaching the word," happy if by any means they might impart to us benighted heathens the salvation which they had found. Should not, then, some measure, at least, of that zeal be shewn by us? Should not their souls be precious in our eyes, as ours were in theirs? It is a shame to us that we think so lightly of this matter; and that we, who ought to take the lead in every thing that is good and great, are so backward to exert ourselves in this holy cause. I well know that sloth and indifference will furnish us with reasons enough for delay: but I would ask, what reason has any man for neglecting this duty, which might not have been urged with still greater force by the Jews for a neglect of us? The attempt to convert the Jews might have been deemed visionary a few years ago: but shall it be judged visionary now? I say, without fear of contradiction, that the efforts which have been made within these few years have produced a great effect, if not in numerous conversions, yet at least in that which must precede conversion; and which conversion may reasonably, in many instances, be expected to follow; I mean, the conviction of their minds of the truth of Christianity. I do say, that this effect is seen, felt, and acknowledged by the Jews themselves: and if the periodical publications which are issued forth on this subject were perused, the truth of this assertion would most abundantly appear. Permit me, then, to call the attention of this assembly to this momentous subject; and to press on all who hear me this day, to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty," even against the mighty prejudices of the Jewish people, and the no less formidable indifference of the Christian world. A good example here would be felt throughout the land, and would tend not a little to diffuse, both among Jews at home and Jews abroad, the light which we possess, and the salvation we enjoy. I ask, is that true which our Lord has spoken,

“ If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins?” If this be true, then are that whole people perishing by millions. And shall we suffer them thus to “ perish for lack of knowledge ?” God forbid. If any of us know what salvation is, we ought to impart it to others. We feel this obligation in some measure to the heathen, to whom we are not at all indebted; and yet overlook it in reference to the Jews, from whom we have received all the light and knowledge we possess. This ought not so to be: this should not continue one hour longer: we ought all to rise, as one man, to repair, as far as possible, our past neglect, and to fulfil our duties to God and man. But, if we will still continue to hide our talent in a napkin, know all of you, that you shall be called into judgment for it, and that the doom of the unprofitable servant must await you. But “ let me hope better things, though I thus speak, even things that accompany salvation.” I thank God that some at least have awaked to the calls of justice and of mercy; of justice to God, who has entrusted them with their talents; and of mercy to the Jews, who so greatly need their improvement of them. And I pray God that this spirit may abound more and more; and that they who embark in this good cause may soon have the happiness to see that “ they have not laboured in vain, nor run in vain.”

MDCXVIII.

THE WORSHIP WHICH GOD REQUIRES.

John iv. 24. *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

BRETHREN, you are all upon the brink of eternity. You are all sinners. As sinners, you stand in need of mercy at the hands of God: and God is willing to bestow mercy upon every one of you, without exception. But he must be inquired of, in order that he may do this for you: and he must be inquired of, not in a cold and formal manner, but in sincerity of

heart; for "He is a Spirit; and all who worship him, must," as my text informs you, "worship him in spirit and in truth."

Let this declaration sink down into your ears; and let it operate strongly on your minds, whilst we contemplate it;

I. As an answer to a particular inquiry—

Our Lord was conversing with a woman of Samaria, and had shewn to her that he was perfectly acquainted with all the evils she had committed in her former life, and with those in the indulgence of which she was still living. She, not wishing to hear any thing further upon a subject so painful to her mind, sought to turn the conversation into another channel; and for that purpose inquired what his sentiments were on a point that was at issue between the Jews and the Samaritans, namely, whether God was to be worshipped at Jerusalem, or at Mount Gerizim in Samaria? Our Lord, in reply to her question, tells her, that the time was now come, when the Father was no longer to be worshipped in any one place more than another; but that in every place under heaven, those, and those only, should have access to him, who "worshipped him in spirit and in truth."

This directly met the inquiry which had been made—

[Till that time "bodily exercise" had certainly prevailed in the services of God's people, whose access to him was chiefly in the use of prescribed forms, which were shadowy and typical, and were confined to one city, and to one particular building in that city. The directions which God had given in relation to this matter, even before his people came into possession of the promised land, were very specific: "Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither shalt thou come; and thither ye shall bring your burnt-offerings, &c. &c. and there ye shall eat before the Lord your God." At the time when the temple of Solomon was consecrated, the people were instructed, that, if they should go out to battle, or be carried captives to a foreign land, they must turn towards that place, when they made their supplications

* Deut. xii. 5—7.

to the Lord for help or mercy: and an intimation was given, that, even if they should "return to God with all their heart and all their soul," it would not suffice, unless they also "directed their prayers towards that place^b." From hence, as well as from the examples of their holiest prophets^c, they were led to suppose, that no prayer would be accepted, but such as should be offered in that precise manner. There was indeed under that very dispensation ample evidence that that conclusion was erroneous: for God had said, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word^d." Still, however, this matter was not generally understood, till our blessed Lord proclaimed, that Jehovah was a Spirit, and therefore not confined to any place, but pervading all space, and accessible to all who desired to draw nigh unto him. He no longer now was to be approached with mere bodily service, or 'in carnal ordinances, but "in spirit," as opposed to the one, and "in truth," as opposed to the other: and they who so approached to him should never be permitted to "seek his face in vain."]

In this view it is of importance to us also—

[We are apt to lay an undue stress on externals; and to imagine, that a peculiar measure of acceptance is to be found at the table of the Lord, more than at any other time or place. (Let me not be here misunderstood, as though I would undervalue the ordinance of the Lord's Supper: for it is our bounden duty to commemorate our Lord's death in that ordinance; and from a *spiritual* and *believing* participation of the bread and wine, we may undoubtedly expect the richest benefits.) But from a mere formal attendance on that ordinance we receive no more good, than from a similar attendance on the common services of the Church. It is to the heart alone that God looks: if that be not right towards him, no service whatever can be "acceptable in his sight:" but, if that be under the influence of penitence and faith, its offerings, under whatever circumstances they be presented, shall surely come up with acceptance before him.]

That this truth may be more fully brought before you, I shall consider the text,

II. As an instruction suited to all times and circumstances—

The thing which God expects, is, that there be a

^b 1 Kings viii. 44, 48. ^c Ps. xxviii. 2. Dan. vi. 10.

^d Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

correspondence between the feelings of our heart, and the offerings of our lips—

[If, for instance, we confess our sins before him, it is not sufficient that our *words* be humble; our *spirit* must be humble too, and a holy penitential sorrow must fill our hearts. If we present our petitions before him, it is not sufficient that we ask for such things as are good and desirable, but we must feel an ardent desire after them in our souls, and plead for them with an importunity suited to the importance of them. So also, if we return thanks to God, we must not rest in unmeaning compliments, but adore and magnify our God from our inmost souls. If there be not this correspondence between our feelings and our words, what “truth” is there in us? Our services are no better than a solemn mockery, that must offend, rather than please, the Majesty of heaven.]

Such sincerity the very nature of God requires—

["He is a Spirit," that pervades all space. He is equally present with all his creatures; nor is there a thought in the heart of any person in the universe, that is not “naked and open before him.” Were he able to behold our actions only, he might be pleased with our services, though unaccompanied with any devout affection: but when “he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins,” and “weigheth” with infallible accuracy “our very spirits,” how can he listen to our heartless addresses with any satisfaction? Verily such prayers must be, as he declares they are, an utter “abomination unto him.” When some under the Jewish dispensation brought to him “the blind, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice,” he appealed to them, “Whether it was not evil?” “Go,” says he, “offer these now unto your Governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your persons?” What then must he say to those who think to impose upon him by prayers which proceed “from the lips only, whilst the heart is far from him?” Assuredly he will say, “Bring no more such vain oblations,” ye hypocrites, for “in vain do ye worship me:” “your most solemn services are an iniquity” which I utterly abhor, and “I am weary to bear them.”]

Unite with me then, whilst I make your prayers a subject of strict INQUIRY—

[It is to be feared that many of you, who would yet wish to be thought good Christians, live without even the form of prayer. Look back only to this very morning; look back to the past week; look back throughout your whole lives; and see, whether you have ever spent one single hour in secret

• Mal. i. 8. † Matt. xv. 7—9. ‡ Isai. i. 11—14.

prayer to God? Ah! does not conscience condemn the greater part of you? Have not many of you, as far as prayer is concerned, lived rather like brute beasts, than as rational and immortal beings? — — — Or, supposing you have kept up a form of prayer, has it not been a mere form? You who teach your children to repeat some form of prayer in your presence, know very well that *theirs* is not prayer: and what is yours better than theirs? Your heavenly Father, in whose presence you read or repeat your forms, knows how to estimate them, whilst they are offered without any suitable emotions. The way for you to judge of them is this: set before your eyes a person perishing in the sea, and supplicating deliverance from his perils; and then compare your feelings with his. His feelings you can easily conceive: and if yours have no correspondence with them, no such sense of danger, no such desire of help, no such thankfulness for the efforts used in your behalf, you have yet to learn the nature of prayer, and yet to begin that work, without which you must perish in your sins — — —]

But let me not conclude without adding a few words
OF ENCOURAGEMENT—

[It is not improbable that some may be ready to write bitter things against themselves, because they find not fluency in prayer. But it is not by our fluency in utterance that God judges of our prayers, but by the humility of our minds, and the fervour of our desires. A sigh, or groan, proceeding from a broken and contrite heart, is of more value in his sight, than the richest effusions of eloquence that ever proceeded from the lips of man. Never was there a more acceptable prayer offered by mortal man than that of the Publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Take courage then, ye who are dejected because ye find not such utterance as ye could wish. "God knoweth the mind of the Spirit:" and it is in sighs and groans chiefly that "his Spirit maketh intercession in us." Only let there be a sincerity of heart before him, and your very breathings shall be heard, and descend in blessings on your souls; for "he seeketh such to worship him," and will fulfil the *desire* of them that so approach him. If only you "*look to him*, you shall be lightened;" and if you *hope in him*, you shall assuredly be made partakers of his kingdom and glory."]

MDCXIX.

CONVICTION OF SIN, A PREPARATIVE FOR SALVATION.

John iv. 29. *Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*

LITTLE do we know what a day or an hour may bring forth. It was probably owing to an unexpected temptation that this Samaritan woman fell into the sin which led to that vicious and abandoned course which she afterwards pursued. And to what the world in general would call a most accidental circumstance, she was indebted for the salvation of her soul. It happened, as we say, that the Lord Jesus Christ came to relieve his weariness and thirst at Jacob's well, whither she also had come to draw water. There, contrary to what might have been expected, the Saviour entered into conversation with her, and brought conviction to her mind, and revealed himself to her as the promised Messiah; and made her, who had been an occasion of evil to many, to become to many the means of their salvation: for, on being interrupted in her conversation by his Disciples, who had gone into the adjacent city to purchase food, she herself went into the city, and said to all whom she met, "Come, and see a man who told me all things that ever I did! Is not this the Christ?"

In considering this address of hers to her fellow-citizens, I shall take occasion to shew,

I. The power of God's word to produce conviction—

Our Lord had told her what were undoubtedly the most remarkable occurrences of her life, that "she had had five husbands, and that the man with whom she was now living was not her husband." This brought all her former life so strongly to her recollection, that it seemed as if he had "told her all things that she had ever done." And this is no uncommon effect of God's word upon the mind and conscience; as St. Paul has told us: "If all in a Church prophesy, (that is, preach,) and there come

in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and *thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest*; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth^a." It then appeared, and frequently does also at this hour, that a preacher may be led to touch on some points so forcibly and circumstantially, as to seem as if he had been actually made acquainted with the secret history of one or other of his hearers, and were intentionally developing to his audience the history of that particular individual. Now, whence is this? I think it may be well accounted for, by considering what the Spirit of God effects, when he applies any single word with power to the soul.

1. He "opens the eyes of the understanding"^b—

[A man that is blind cannot see any thing: but when his eyes are opened, he sees all the things that are before him, and within the reach of his visual organs. Thus it is when God is pleased to give us a spiritual discernment: we do not see this or that particular sin only, but our entire defection from God, and our whole life, as one continued course of rebellion against him.]

2. He discloses to us the inmost recesses of the soul—

[The soul of man may fitly be compared to the chambers of imagery in Ezekiel's vision. All is transacting there in secret; and nothing is known but to God himself; till God directs his servant to a hole in the wall, by which a variety of things may be discerned. Now, thus it is that the Spirit of God opens sometimes a hole, and sometimes even a window or a door, by means of which the interior of the soul is made manifest, and the sinner is enabled to see things of which he had before a very indistinct idea. We may conceive a painted sepulchre, beautiful to behold by those who see only its exterior. But, when it is laid open, and all its foul contents are exposed to view, it is too lothesome an object to look upon without the utmost disgust and abhorrence. It would not be necessary to take an accurate survey of the offensive object in all its parts: a person would readily say, 'I have seen it all.' And so, when God gives to a man a sight of his chief corruptions, it appears as if every transaction of his life had been made to pass before him.]

^a 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

^b Luke xxiv. 45. Eph. i. 18.

3. He awakens conscience to a discharge of its proper office—

[Conscience, in an unawakened man, neglects its duty altogether. It ought to observe and weigh our every act, and to report to us its true character, even as it appears before God himself. But, when the Spirit of God awakens it by the word, it estimates aright our whole character, and without flattery makes us known to ourselves. It exerts itself then with authority: it makes the whole life pass before it in review: it sits in the throne of judgment: it speaks in the name of God himself: it passes sentence even on the most secret actions of our lives; it takes into its account all attendant circumstances of aggravation; and anticipates the judgment of the last day.]

Thus we may account for the impression made on the mind of this Samaritan, and the report she gave on leaving the Saviour's presence. Though every thing that she had ever done had not been distinctly told her, it appeared as if it had; and the effect upon her mind was the same as if it had.]

But, that the power of God's word may yet more clearly appear, let us proceed to notice,

II. The effect of conviction, when produced—

Mark the effect of it on her: you see in her,

1. A desire to receive instruction—

[Man in his natural state has no wish for instruction in the things that relate to God. He is satisfied with his own crude notions, and is averse to have them tried by the standard of Holy Writ. "He hates the light, and will not come to it, lest his deeds should be reproved." But when the Spirit of God has fixed conviction on the mind, a man will be glad to know the truth: his very first inquiry will be, "What must I do to be saved?" Thus the woman, thinking that that was true which Jesus had said to her respecting his Messiahship, and that his perfect knowledge of her secret history was an evidence of it, was desirous that her fellow-citizens should give her their judgment concerning it: "Come, and see a man that told me all things that ever I did! Is not this the Christ?" She thought them competent to judge, and took for granted that they would give her their unbiassed opinion upon this momentous question: and though it was but too probable that the notoriety of her character would bring upon her some cutting reflections, she cared not for it, if only she might obtain satisfaction to her mind. It is particularly noticed, that "she left her water-pot behind her!" and this she did, not merely that she might not be detained; (for the detention

could at the utmost have only been a few minutes;) but probably forgetting for the time her earthly business, through the ardour of her mind in the pursuit of heavenly knowledge. And thus it is that every awakened soul will act. It will desire knowledge: it will pursue it at the risk of all the obloquy which may attach to a desire after it: and it will postpone all earthly things, to the acquisition of it.]

2. A candour in our inquiries after it—

[Where the heart is unaffected, incredulity and scepticism usually take the lead; and a greater degree of evidence than the subject well admits of, is required. But, where a person feels his guilt as a sinner, and his utter incapacity to save himself, he will feel a predisposition to receive the truth. He will not with sceptical indifference say, "Is this the Christ?" but, with a wish that his pretensions to that character may be found true, "Is *not* this the Christ?" It may be said, that here was an undue bias. But I deny that it was an undue bias. In a matter which is itself indifferent, we may be indifferent: but in a matter which concerns the glory of God and the salvation of the whole world, indifference would be highly criminal. The misery of man is seen, felt, acknowledged. Here purports to be a revelation from heaven, and a Saviour sent us by Almighty God for the redemption of man. This is *not* to be a matter of speculative inquiry. It should be examined with a desire that it may be true. The precise state of mind which every person should experience, is that which was experienced by the man whose eyes the Lord Jesus Christ had opened. The Lord Jesus asked him, "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" The man answered, not coolly and indifferently, "Who is he?" but, with becoming anxiety, "Who is he, that I may believe on him?" Though credulity is not good, neither, on the other hand, is incredulity: there is a just medium between the two, a readiness to believe on sufficient evidence. The readiness of the other Disciples to believe in Jesus was commended, whilst the incredulity of Thomas was blamed. And this shews us the precise state of mind which deep conviction generates; a candour in our inquiries after truth, with an unfeigned desire to embrace it the very instant it is fairly laid before us with a weight of evidence sufficient to sustain it.]

3. A wish that others also may be partakers of it—

[It was not from a mere desire to ask their judgment that the Samaritan woman went into the city, but with a hope that her fellow-citizens might participate in the blessings which she

• John ix. 36.

had experienced in her soul. This is clear: for they themselves said, that they had believed because of her word: so that she had not been a mere inquirer, but a preacher also. And this is the invariable effect of deep conviction on the mind; it will stir up the person to make others acquainted with the same important truths as have been useful to his own soul. No truly enlightened person will keep his discoveries to himself. He will say to his friends and neighbours, "Come, and see." This is declared by our Lord in various parables^d: and, in confirmation of it, the Church, in most appropriate and expressive language, says, "Draw ME; and WE will run after thee." Draw me, and I will never be content to come alone: I will draw all I can along with me.]

We have hitherto noticed only the *acts* of this woman. But we should not entirely overlook her *person* and *character*, which may well supply us with our concluding observations.

OBSERVE, then,

1. How unbounded is the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ—

[We have seen how his word wrought conviction on her soul; and eventually imparted salvation to her, and to others by her means. But we have not sufficiently considered either *who* she was, - An alien and a hostile Samaritan; or *what* she was, Even such an abandoned wretch, that it was a shame even to be seen speaking to her. Yet to this woman did our Lord reveal himself more fully and plainly than he had done to any one of his Disciples*. How sweetly encouraging is this fact! Who that considers this, can despair? Or, rather, who does not here see an intimation of the grace that should afterwards be shewn to the Gentiles, and of the mercy that should be exercised towards the chief of sinners? Know, then, that no past iniquities shall be any bar to your acceptance with him, if only you will humble yourselves before him, and believe in him, as the Christ, the Saviour of the world.]

2. What encouragement we all have to exert ourselves for him—

[It was but little that she knew: and little could be expected from any testimony of hers. Yet, what she spoke sank down into the ears of all that heard it, and was rendered instrumental to the bringing of them to Christ. Let none then

^d The Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, and the Prodigal Son: Luke xv.

* ver. 26.

say, "I am ignorant: I am sinful: I, as a female, am unauthorized to speak." Though every one is not authorized to preach, every one, in his own proper circle, is bound to declare what God has done for his soul: and if every one would exert himself as this woman did, especially in bringing others to the means of grace, that they may hear for themselves, we should see conversions far more numerous, and blessings far more widely diffused through the world. The lepers of Samaria, when they found plenty in the deserted camp of the Syrians, said, They did not well to keep the glad tidings to themselves. And can we, after having found salvation, do well in keeping it to ourselves? No: we should invite others to participate the blessings we enjoy; and, being converted ourselves, should do all in our power to strengthen and to save our brethren^f.]

^f Luke xxii. 32.

MDCXX.

CHRIST'S DILIGENCE IN SERVING GOD.

John iv. 34. *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

OUR blessed Lord, throughout his whole life, was the most illustrious pattern of condescension to man and of fidelity to God. Both these dispositions were eminently displayed in the history before us. Notwithstanding he was already exhausted with a long and fatiguing journey, he had been labouring for the salvation of a most abandoned adulteress: and when urged to intermit his exertions for a little while in order to recruit his strength by some necessary refreshment, he declared, that food was not so delightful to a famished body, as the prosecuting of the great ends of his ministry was to his soul.

From his words we shall take occasion to,

I. Consider our Lord's example—

Jesus, in his human and mediatorial capacity, was the Father's servant. And the work assigned him was, to reveal in a more perfect manner the will of God, and to save mankind by his own obedience unto death.

In this work he engaged,

1. With fervent affection—

[Nothing could exceed the delight with which he *undertook* the arduous task^a: nothing the zeal with which he *accomplished* it^b. Whether we view his private addresses to God^c, or his public ministrations among men^d, we shall see that in him was that prophecy accomplished, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”]

2. With indefatigable diligence—

[From the commencement of his ministry to the end of it not a day was unemployed. Frequently, after having laboured all the day, he spent the night in prayer, and resumed his labours with the returning light. Like the sun in the firmament, he proceeded in one steady course through all the cities, towns, and villages; nor ever ceased from his work, till he could say, “It is finished.”]

3. With undaunted resolution—

[What “continual opposition” did he endure! He was truly “a sign spoken against,” or a butt of contradiction^e. There was not any thing however perverse, scandalous, or contemptuous, but his ears were assailed with it from day to day. From the very first discourse he uttered till the hour of his crucifixion, his enemies never ceased to seek his life^f. Yet did he persevere in the face of every danger, and at last complete his obedience, by surrendering up his life upon the cross.]

That we may profit from this great example, we will,

II. Propose it for your imitation—

We also have a work to do for God—

[Our work is great; but O! how different from that which was committed to our Lord! We have not to satisfy the demands of justice, or to endure the wrath due to sin: blessed be God! *that* was the Redeemer's work; and it has been finished by him on our behalf. The work which we have to do is to believe in Christ^h, and, from a sense of his love to us, to devote ourselves unreservedly to his serviceⁱ.]

Let us then engage in it,

^a Ps. xl. 7, 8.

^b Luke xii. 50.

^c Heb. v. 7.

^d He was filled with joy at the least prospect of success, ver. 35. and he grieved and wept when he could not succeed, Mark iii. 5. Luke xix. 41.

^e John ii. 17.

^f Luke ii. 34.

^g John xi. 8.

^h John vi. 29.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 1.

1. Heartily—

["Whatever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our might^k." A lukewarm service is unacceptable, yea, hateful to God^l. Let us then first labour to know the will of God, and then endeavour to do it with our whole hearts. Let us be "fervent in spirit, while we serve the Lord^m."]]

2. Uniformly—

[It is not an occasional act of zeal that will please God, but a steady conscientious, uniform discharge of our duty. Our spirit, alas! is often faint; and even, when "the spirit is willing, our flesh is weak." But we must counteract our sloth, and "give all diligence to make our calling and election sureⁿ."]]

3. Courageously—

[We shall surely meet with reproach and persecution, if we set ourselves in earnest to serve the Lord^o. But let us "remember him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself^p." Woe be to us if we draw back through the fear of man^q. We must hate, not only father and mother, but even our own life also, if we would be Christ's Disciples^r. Let us then "take up our cross daily" after Christ's example, and "suffer with him, in order that we may be also glorified together^s."]]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are unconcerned about the work of God—

[Has not God appointed you a work to do; and ought you not to have begun it long ago? Is it expedient to leave it to a dying hour? What if you should die before it is finished? O, begin instantly; for the "night cometh, wherein no man can work."]]

2. Those who do his work deceitfully—

[God has pronounced such persons accursed, no less than if they did nothing for him^t. His service must be your "meat" and drink; the joy of your souls, and the business of your lives. See then that ye "approve yourselves to God as servants that need not be ashamed^u."]]

3. Those who are in a measure conformed to their Saviour's image—

^k Eccles. ix. 10.^l 2 Pet. i. 10.^m Heb. x. 38.ⁿ Jer. xlviii. 10.^o Rev. iii. 15, 16.^p 2 Tim. iii. 12.^q Luke xiv. 26.^r 2 Tim. ii. 15.^s Rom. xii. 11.^t Heb. xii. 3.^u Rom. viii. 17.

[Bless your God, who has thus far enabled you to serve him. But O! think how much you fall short of your heavenly pattern! Forget then what is behind, and press forward for that which is before you^x: so shall you in due season “rest from your labours,” and be welcomed as good and faithful servants to the joy of your Lord^y.]

^x Phil. iii. 13—15.

^y Matt. xxv. 21.

MDCXXI.

THE HAPPY STATE OF THE CHURCH.

John iv. 35, 36. *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*

AMAZING was the condescension of our blessed Lord. No one was too mean or too vile for him to notice with his favourable regards. His enemies cast this as a reflection on his character, that he was “a friend of publicans and sinners.” The woman with whom he had been conversing was certainly of as abandoned a caste as can well be conceived: but the result of his conversation with her was most extraordinary: for, through her, a vast multitude flocked to hear him, and *that*, too, with a readiness of mind to receive his instructions, insomuch that they appeared like “a field of corn white already to harvest.”

This expression of our Lord respecting them will properly lead us to consider,

I. The prospects opening around us—

The times in which we live are perhaps as remarkable as any since the apostolic age. Though religion has been on the increase in this nation for half a century, yet it is within these twenty years that the spread of it has become so remarkable, as to attract the notice of all who are in the least observant of what relates to the kingdom of God. Before that time, it might have been said, “There are yet four

months to the harvest," and any prospect of reaping a harvest of immortal souls is distant: but now we may say, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." Observe what the state of things is, ..

1. Abroad—

[Was there ever such a co-operation seen, as that which now exists throughout almost the whole of Christendom, for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, and for the translation of them into all the different languages of the world? A few years ago such a combination of zeal in the interests of religion would have been thought to be scarcely within the regions of possibility^a — — — The multitude of missions, too, which are now established in every quarter of the globe, are no less worthy of our especial notice^b — — — A field laden with the ripened produce of the earth scarcely differs more from that which is lying fallow, than the face of Christendom does in these respects from its aspect at any period during the last two hundred years.]

2. At home—

[Here it comes more within our own more immediate observation. See the societies formed throughout the land for every benevolent purpose, and especially for whatever may advance the kingdom of Christ on earth; such as, for the education of children, the circulation of the Bible, the support of missions, &c. &c. It is a remarkable fact, that whereas fifteen years ago the whole amount of *annual* subscriptions for such purposes did not amount to more than 50,000*l.*, they now exceed 500,000*l.* Together with this, true piety also has increased to a vast extent^c — — — We may well therefore regard our whole country as "a field, that is white already to harvest."]

Let us now extend our views to,

II. The encouragement we have to make a suitable improvement of them—

All should labour, to the utmost of their power, to advance the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. And to this we have equal encouragement,

^a Here will be ample scope for such particulars as may be deemed worthy of particular notice.

^b Here, also, particular Missions may be specified.

^c Here any particulars relating to any of the above things may be introduced: and, if need be, some reference to the particular congregation addressed.

1. In the event of good success—

[The work of God is here compared to a harvest, which a successful preacher may be said to reap. A man who reaps his field considers himself well repaid for his labour, because he lays up in his barns wealth which will support him through the year. But how much better is the Christian Minister repaid! for he “gathers fruit unto life eternal.” What he reaps, will be laid up in the granary of heaven, and will itself endure through eternal ages; yea, and endure also as “his joy and crown of rejoicing” for evermore^d. Were he to gather but one sheaf of corn, he would be richly recompensed for a whole life of labour: but if his efforts be crowned with a larger measure of success, he will have proportionable ground for joy and gratitude to all eternity^e——]

2. In the event of ill success—

[The man who sows his field may be disappointed in a variety of ways: an untoward season may destroy his crop; or an invading enemy deprive him of it; or death may arrest him before it is reaped. But the spiritual “sower shall rejoice together with the reaper,” and have “his own reward according to his own labour^f.” “The Lord of the harvest will not suffer any one of his labourers to work for nought. In the very work itself he shall find a rich reward; and “though Israel be not gathered, yet shall he who sought their welfare be glorious before the Lord^g.” Hosea prophesied for seventy years, and Isaiah fifty; and both of them had reason to complain, “Who hath believed our report?” But are they therefore without a recompence? No: What “they sowed, we reap: they laboured, and we have entered into their labours.” And, as they shall participate our joy, so shall we the joy of those who shall reap what we have sown.]

Let us then,

1. Be on our watch, to do all the good we can—

[Our blessed Lord was sitting weary by a well-side: yet, when an opportunity afforded itself of instructing the Samaritan woman, he embraced it, accounting it “his meat to do the will of him that sent him^h.” And who would have thought that such effects should flow from that single conversation? So it may be with us. We make many attempts apparently in vain: but who can tell what one single act of benevolence

^d 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

^e Here the blessedness of “those who are saved” may be opened, together with its aspect on the happiness of “those who save them.”

^f 1 Tim. iv. 16.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^h Isai. xlix. 5.

^h ver. 6, 14, 24, 34.

may produce? Let the occasion before us encourage us to "be instant in season and out of season," and to "sow both early and late, not knowing which shall prosper," or what blessings may result from an individual effort¹.]

2. Increase our labours as opportunities for labour are increased—

["The field for labour is the *world*." Heretofore but small portions of it have been open to us; but now men are calling to us from every quarter of the globe, "Come over, and help us!" Let us then extend our labours far and wide: yea, let us make it "our very meat to do the will of God;" having a constant appetite for it, and accounting every day as lost, in which we have not done somewhat for the souls of men. Let the nature of the harvest animate us. Think of immortal souls; and, whether reaped by us or not, yet if reaped by others, at whatever distance of time, in consequence of what we have sowed, reckoned to us as "our joy and crown!" Let us, I say, gird up our loins to this good work; and we shall surely "rejoice, in the day of Christ, that we have not laboured in vain, or run in vain²."]]

¹ Eccl. xi. 6.

² Phil. ii. 15, 16. Dan. xii. 13.

MDCXXII.

CONVERSION OF THE SAMARITANS.

John iv. 41, 42. *And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

THE conversion of the Gentiles was not an object of our Lord's personal ministrations: "he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet there were some particular occasions whereon he testified his regard for them, and gave them pledges of that mercy which was afterwards to be displayed towards them by the ministry of his Apostles. Of this we have an instance in the passage before us. He not only declared his Messiahship to the Samaritan woman whom he met at Jacob's well, but spent two days with the Samaritans in the city of Sychar, and converted numbers of them to the obedience of faith. From the testimony which she gave of him,

they entertained high thoughts of his character; but from a personal acquaintance with him they were convinced that he was the Saviour of the world. This is the account which they themselves gave of their own experience: and from it we shall take occasion to,

I. Distinguish between the kinds of faith here mentioned—

We ought to seek clear views of religion in general, but especially of its fundamental points. Now there is no subject more important, nor any about which more mistaken notions are entertained, than the nature of saving faith. But the distinction is here drawn for us with great accuracy.

The faith which the Samaritans first exercised was founded on mere report—

[The woman had testified to them that Jesus had told her all the secrets of her heart, even such as could be known only to the Most High God: and had appealed to them whether this was not a convincing evidence that he was the long-expected Messiah. Her argument was plain and conclusive: and, as she had no motive for deceiving them, they believed her report of him, and acknowledged the justness of her conclusion.

We do not mean to disparage this kind of faith: it was good as far as it went; and it was productive of solid benefit to the persons who possessed it, inasmuch as it removed all their prejudices, and disposed them to form a more accurate judgment for themselves. But still we cannot regard this faith in any other light than as a speculative assent, grounded upon human testimony. It seems to have been not unlike to that which is so common amongst ourselves, which arises from a view of the evidences of our religion. We see that all the ancient types and prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, and that most unquestionable miracles were wrought by him and his Apostles in confirmation of his word; and therefore we say that he is, and must be, the Messiah. Yet those who are most versed in this kind of reasoning, are not always suitably affected with it: their knowledge of Christianity is, in many cases, merely speculative, residing in their heads, but never descending into their hearts, nor influencing their lives. We cannot therefore consider this as a saving faith: being unproductive of good works, it is dead; and, if carried no further, will leave the

possessor of it in the state of those unhappy spirits, of whom it is said, "They believe, and tremble^a."]

The faith to which they afterwards attained, was founded on their own experience—

[During the two days that our blessed Lord staid among them, they heard him discourse on the things relating to his kingdom. They perceived that "he spake as never man spake;" and "his word was with power." As it had before probed the heart of the woman at the well, so it searched their hearts, and disclosed to them all their hidden abominations. It shewed them, that they themselves were lost, yea, that the whole world also was in a perishing condition; and that He was sent of God on purpose to deliver them. From the correspondence which they saw between the character he sustained and the necessities they felt, they were assured "that he was the Christ, the Saviour of the world:" and they determined to rely on him, as *their* Saviour, and *their* Redeemer.

Now this was saving faith: it brought them fully to Christ for the ends for which he was sent into the world: "With their hearts they believed on him unto righteousness: and with their mouths they made confession unto salvation^b." This faith was very different from that which they first exercised: it was more *distinct*, more *assured*, more *influential*: they had more full and complete views of the objects of Christ's mission — — — they "had within themselves a witness" of the suitableness and sufficiency of his salvation — — — and they instantly became his open and avowed Disciples, in spite of all their former prejudices, and the prejudices of all around them — — —

Certainly we must look for good works as fruits and evidences of this faith: but this faith, supposing it to be sincere, will assuredly issue in salvation.]

We proceed to notice,

II. The importance of making this distinction—

Two facts will serve to illustrate this:

1. For want of distinguishing *aright*, many sincere persons are distressed—

[The nature of saving faith has, as might well be expected, been a subject of controversy in the Christian world: and it is to be lamented, that, whilst some have placed the standard too low, others have raised it too high. A full assurance of our own personal acceptance with God has been supposed by many to be an essential part of true faith: and hence multitudes who

^a Jam. ii. 17, 19.

^b Rom. x. 10.

have really "fled to Christ for refuge as to the hope set before them," are disquieted from day to day, because they do not feel in themselves that assurance. But God does not require us to believe more than he himself has revealed: and where has he revealed that any particular individual amongst us is in a state of salvation? or where has he said that the belief of our own personal interest in Christ is necessary in order to our obtaining an interest in him? Indeed, such a declaration would be absurd: it would be a contradiction in terms: it would require us to believe that a thing does exist, in order that it may exist; which is as absurd, as to believe that we *are* well, in order that we *may be* well; or that we *are* in heaven, in order that we *may be* in heaven. A thing must exist, before we can know that it exists; and therefore the knowledge of our acceptance with God cannot precede that acceptance; much less can it be necessary in order to our acceptance with him. As for straining metaphorical expressions in order to found doctrines upon them, it is injudicious in the extreme. It is far better to examine what that faith was, which was exercised by the saints of old, and which they found effectual to their salvation: and if we do that, we shall always find, that the faith by which they were saved, was a faith of *affiance*, and not that which is generally (but improperly) called a faith of *assurance*. Assurance is necessary, so far as it relates to Christ's ability and willingness to save us; but it is not necessary in relation to our own personal acceptance with him: this is desirable, no doubt, and a great source of comfort to the person who possesses it: but they who do not possess it, may yet be in a state of salvation, and enjoy much consolation in the hope that they shall not finally be cast out.

Is there any one then amongst us under such circumstances; let him be of good courage, and in humble confidence cast himself upon the mercy of a reconciled God^c. If he perish at the foot of the cross, he will be the first that ever perished there — — —]

2. For want of distinguishing *at all*, many insincere persons are ruined—

[The generality of persons seem to have no idea of any faith beyond that of a mere assent to certain propositions: and, if they have never set themselves to oppose Christianity, they take for granted that they are believers. They were born in a Christian land, and have been educated in the Christian faith, and therefore they suppose that all is well. If they are licentious in their conduct, they will allow perhaps that they

^c Isai. l. 10.

are deficient in their morals; yet they never suspect that they are materially wrong in their faith. But let them look around, and see what is the fruit of such faith as they possess: do they find it productive of any such effects as resulted from the faith of the first Christians? No: it leaves the possessors of it under the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil, as much as the heathens themselves. How then can this be saving faith, of which it is said, It "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world?" Yet under this delusion the generality of Christians both live and die———Is it not important then that they should be told, that "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh^d?" Surely, whatever such persons may imagine, if ever they be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, they will say, Now we believe in Christ, not because we have been told by our Parents that Christianity is true, but because we have heard him ourselves speaking to us in his word, and have felt that he is exactly such a Saviour as our necessities require.]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us not deceive ourselves by resting in a spurious and inefficient faith—

[St. Paul exhorts us to "examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith." And truly, when we see what little influence our faith has had upon us in times past, we may well suspect that it has not been of a right kind———If we continue in our delusion any longer, our error may soon be past a remedy———]

2. If enlightened ourselves, let us endeavour to enlighten others—

[Some may say, The vileness of my character, or the weakness of my capacity, render it unfit for me to attempt the instruction of others. But, if we only consider what honour God put upon this vile adulteress, in making her the instrument of drawing multitudes to Christ, we shall see that no one need be discouraged. An angel could be no more to us than what God made him: and God is pleased to use the weakest instruments, in order that "the excellency of the power may appear to be of him." Let us therefore, each in his place and station, "declare what the Lord hath done for our souls;" and invite others to "come and taste how gracious the Lord is."]

^d Rom. ii. 28, 29.

MDCXXIII.

THE NOBLEMAN'S SON CURED.

John iv. 49—51. *The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.*

IF the rebukes of God be in one view tokens of his displeasure, they certainly in another view are expressions of his regard, and have frequently been forerunners of peculiar mercy. The Canaanitish woman was frowned upon, as it were, by our Lord, as utterly unworthy to taste the children's bread; yet was immediately afterwards admitted to a participation of it. Thus the nobleman, who now addressed him, received a reprimand for his backwardness to believe; but was nevertheless favoured instantly with an answer suited to his wish.

The circumstances related in the text lead us to observe,

I. That weak and strong faith differ widely in their effects—

This is particularly discoverable in the history before us—

[The nobleman's faith, though weak, induced him to take a considerable journey that he might find Jesus, and brought him to apply to Jesus with much humility and respect. Yet he could not refrain from limiting the power of Jesus, and prescribing to him the time and manner in which his request should be granted. And because his petition was not granted at first, he grew impatient, and intimated his apprehensions, that, if the relief were not instantly afforded, it would soon be too late even for Jesus himself to interfere. But when his faith was strengthened by the word and Spirit of Christ, the tumult in his mind subsided, the irritation yielded to composure, and his apprehensions were banished by a firm expectation that the promised blessing should be given. Though he saw no change with his eyes, yet he doubted not but that a change had taken place; and he left it to Jesus to accomplish his own word in his own way.]

Such are the various effects produced in us also by a similar cause—

[The weakest faith, if truly sincere, will bring us to Jesus with reverence and humility; and will make us urgent with him to bestow upon us his benefits. Nor shall we regard any trouble in seeking him, provided we at last obtain the desired blessings: but if our “hope be deferred, it will make our heart sick.” We shall become impatient, if the pardon which we seek be not instantly sealed upon our consciences, or the victory we solicit be suspended for a while in dubious conflict. We shall be ready to dictate to Jesus both the time and manner of his interference, and to limit his powers according to our own narrow apprehensions of them. When our faith is strengthened, we shall rest more simply on his declarations and promises. We shall not, like Zacharias, want a sign to confirm them, or, like Rebekah, use sinful means of hastening their accomplishment^a. We shall be willing to let him work in his own way. Though we see not his word yet accomplished, nor know in what way it shall be fulfilled, yet we shall be satisfied, and content to wait till he shall clear up to us what is dark and intricate^b. Our expectation will be patient, and our confidence in him assured. Like Abraham, we shall not stagger at his promises, but give him the glory of his faithfulness and omnipotence^c.]

Nor does God fail to distinguish these different degrees of faith by different tokens of his approbation. This will appear while we observe,

II. The more we exercise faith, the more evidence of its efficacy and acceptance will God vouchsafe unto us—

The experience of the nobleman well illustrates this truth—

[His faith while it was yet weak, prevailed for the obtaining of the mercy he desired. Jesus kindly overlooked his impatience, and granted him even more than he had asked. This was a rich reward of faith. But when the nobleman returned home in full expectation of finding every thing true which Jesus had declared, his faith received a yet stronger confirmation from the account which the servants gave him; and the more minutely he inquired into the circumstances of his son's recovery, the more fully was he convinced that it had been effected by the invisible agency of the Lord Jesus. By

^a Luke i. 18. Compare Gen. xxv. 23. and xxvii. 8—10.

^b Isai. xxviii. 16

^c Rom. iv. 20.

this was his faith yet more abundantly confirmed, insomuch that both he and all his family became Disciples of Jesus^d.]

The same may be traced in the experience of all believers—

[The smallest degree of true faith will surely bring them the pardon of their sins, and whatever is absolutely needful for their salvation. "If their faith be only as a grain of mustard-seed, it shall remove mountains:" but, if they be strong in faith, they shall see the glory of God in a far more conspicuous manner^e. They may not indeed immediately see God, as it were, in the act of working; but they shall see frequent reason to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" When they come to compare events with the promises of God, they will be constrained to acknowledge and adore his good providence. They will see how indebted they have been to his gracious interposition for many deliverances from danger, supports in trouble, and victories in their spiritual warfare. They may indeed, like Joshua himself, be so stumbled for a moment by some dark dispensation, that they shall almost doubt whether they have not been under a delusion^f. But like him, they shall be enabled to look back for a series of years, to recount the mercies of the Lord, and to bear testimony to his unalterable truth and faithfulness^g. Upon a review of their lives, they shall have as clear evidences of a divine interposition in their favour, as if they had seen a miracle wrought before their eyes. Nor shall they hesitate to declare with the holy Apostle, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God^h."] .

To IMPROVE this subject, we would suggest some suitable advice—

1. Let all personal or domestic troubles lead us to Jesus—

["We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." None are exempt from it in this vale of tears. The nobleman is as much exposed to it as the beggar; but God sends it for good. He sends us adversity that we may be led to consideration; and many have found cause to bless him for their troubles. Many must say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray;" "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Hear then the rod, and him that hath appointed it." Its voice to us is, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found;" "turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die." Improve afflictions thus, and you will be thankful for them to all eternity. What a mercy in

^d ver. 52, 53.

^e John xi. 40.

^f Josh. vii. 6—9.

^g Josh. xxiii. 14.

^h 2 Cor. v. 5.

the issue did the sickness of the nobleman's son prove both to the nobleman and all his family! And most assuredly, if your troubles should prove the means of bringing you to an acquaintance with Jesus, and an experience of his grace, you will never regret the means by which the mercy was conferred upon you.]

2. Let us never prescribe to Jesus, or limit the power of his grace—

[The Lord knows best how to deal with his people. He went to the Centurion's house because *he* was both humble and believing; but refused to go to the nobleman's, that he might more effectually correct *his* pride and unbelief. Thus he may pursue various methods with us; but he will act in all things with consummate wisdom. He will "abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence." Let us then commit ourselves to him, saying, *when* thou wilt, and *what* thou wilt, and *as* thou wilt. In this way we shall have our minds composed, and our thoughts established. And though he may lead us, as he did the Israelites, by a very tedious and circuitous path, yet we shall find at last that it was the "right way".]

3. Let every fresh discovery of his mercy make us more solicitous to bring others to him—

[The nobleman doubtless related to his family all that Jesus had spoken to him; and was instrumental in bringing all his family to believe in him. And shall not *we* make this improvement of his mercies vouchsafed to *us*? Shall we not exhort those, over whom we have influence, to trust in his word? Surely if we express a concern for their bodily welfare, we should be no less solicitous for the salvation of their souls. And if we have found the benefit of believing in him ourselves, we should labour that all around us may be partakers of that benefit. By telling of his goodness we shall pay him that tribute which he expects at our hands, and anticipate that employment in which we hope to be occupied to all eternity.]

¹ Ps. cvii. 7.

MDCXXIV.

THE MAN HEALED AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

John v. 14. *Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

MOST men will make good resolutions in a season of affliction; but few carry them into execution when

they have obtained deliverance. They, however, to whom troubles are sanctified will remember the vows that are upon them. They will repair as soon as possible, not to houses of dissipation or amusement, but to "the temple" of God; and, while others are only hardened by their mercies, *these* will be favoured with fresh manifestations of God's love. The man whom our Lord addressed in the text, experienced this. When he was returning thanks for the cure he had received in his body, Jesus instructed him for the good of his soul. We shall consider,

I. The mercy vouchsafed to him.

Bethesda was a pool that possessed very singular qualities—

[The name Bethesda signifies a house of mercy. The pool so called had the property of healing all manner of disorders: its healing operations, however, were confined to certain seasons; they depended also on the agency of a superior power*, and were limited to the first person that went into it after its waters were agitated by an angel. Multitudes of diseased persons constantly attended there; and five porches were built for their accommodation. When that healing power was first given to it cannot be ascertained; probably God had but a few years before endued it with those qualities, in order to prepare the people for their Messiah, and to typify his works.]

In the porches around this pool an impotent man had long waited in vain—

[He had laboured under an infirmity thirty-eight years, and had long attended there in hopes of a cure; but he had no friend to help him with sufficient speed; nor had the people charity enough to let him take his turn. Every one consulted his own good in preference to his; and thus his efforts were daily frustrated, and his hopes continually deferred.]

But Jesus seeing him, wrought a miracle in his favour—

[Jesus needed no solicitations to excite his pity. Though unasked, he tendered the man effectual relief. Little indeed did the man understand the import of our Lord's question^b;

* To ascribe them to the blood of the sacrifices stirred up in the water by a messenger from the temple, only shews to what wretched shifts infidelity is often driven by its desire to explain away the miracles of Christ.

^b ver 6, 7

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but Jesus uttered the irresistible command, and instantly was health restored to this diseased man; yea, he, who but the moment before could not get into the pool for want of help, now easily took up his bed and walked: nor was he intimidated by those who accused him of violating the Sabbath. He rightly judged that the person who had power to heal him thus miraculously, had also authority to direct his conduct.]

For a short season the man knew not the name of his benefactor, but soon after enjoyed an interview with him in the temple. On this occasion the Evangelist relates,

II. The admonition given him—

It was sin which had brought this infirmity upon him—

[God often punishes transgressors even in this life*. This was extremely common under the Jewish economy; nor are there wanting instances under the Christian dispensation^d. If we could dive into the secrets of the Most High, it is probable we should trace many of our troubles to sin as their proper source.]

Nevertheless this did not preclude the exercise of mercy towards him—

[Jesus was full of compassion even to the most unworthy. He often selected such to be the chief objects of his mercy*. Indeed, the displaying of his sovereignty, and grace, is a principal end of all his dispensations^f.]

But he solemnly cautioned him against sin in future—

[Though Jesus pities sinners, he abhors their sin; nor will he accept the persons of those who live in it^g. He reminded the man of the deliverance he had experienced, and guarded him against the cause of his past calamities. This admonition too he enforced with a most weighty argument. The years of misery that the cripple had endured were nothing in comparison of hell-torments: these will hereafter be the recompence of sin; nor will any feel them so bitterly as backsliders and apostates.]

To make a right improvement of these events; we must yet further consider,

III. The instruction to be derived from both.

* Ps. cvii. 17, 18.

^d 1 Cor. xi. 30.

• 1 Tim. i. 13-16.

^f Eph. ii. 7.

^g Luke vi. 46.

1. To *us* divine ordinances are what the pool of Bethesda was to the Jews—

[Here, my brethren, is healing for every disorder of the soul — — — But the waters have no healing virtue in themselves: "If Paul plant, or Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase" — — — But Jesus is present here, as he has said, "Wherever two or three are met together, there am I in the midst of them." And his address to every individual amongst us is, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Nor should any one have reason to complain that others run away with the blessing, provided that he himself were really desirous to obtain it. It is *not the most active*, but *the most humble*, that shall succeed here. O that we were all as sensible of our wants, and as anxious to obtain relief, as were the people that frequented that pool! Verily, not one should depart without obtaining the desired benefit. Dear brethren, you are too apt to be satisfied with attending upon ordinances, and to think that the mere attendance is sufficient, though you reap no solid benefit from them. But it is not in this way that you can hope to receive any blessing from the Lord. You must be sensible of your urgent and pressing wants: you must come to God's house, expecting to receive benefit to your souls: you must implore of him to give effect to his word, and so to accompany it with his blessing that it may prove "the power of God to your salvation." Then shall you find "the word quick and powerful" as in the days of old; and "being renewed in the spirit of your minds," become happy monuments of God's power and grace to all around you.]

2. If we have derived benefit from them, we must manifest it by a holy and consistent walk—

[Every man that has received the grace of God in truth, will revolt at the idea of continuing in sin, as the Apostle did; "Shall I continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall I who am dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Nor must we be unwilling to listen to the motive suggested by our Lord to this favoured man; "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." It is quite a mistake to imagine that a fear of God's judgments is *legal*. It is often inculcated both in the Old Testament and the New¹. And, if Paul himself cherished this principle in his bosom as an incentive to watchfulness², who are *we*, that we should conceive it to be unworthy of a place in our hearts? Doubtless "the love of Christ is to

^h Rom. vi. 1, 2.

¹ Job xxxvi. 13. Heb. x. 38. 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. Rev. ii. 4, 5

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

influence us in the first place: but still we are never to forget our liability to fall; since it is expressly said, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" and, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." In a word, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation to us, teaches us to deny sin of every kind, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world:" and therefore, if, like this impotent man, we have received healing of the Lord, let us glorify him by a life of open, resolute, and unreserved obedience. And if the world raise a clamour against us, let it suffice us to reply, 'We are following the commands of our heavenly Benefactor.']

MDCXXV.

CHRIST'S EQUALITY WITH THE FATHER.

John v. 17, 18. *Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

THE whole Christian world is much indebted to the zeal of the blind, and bigoted, and persecuting Jews in our Lord's day; since they elicited many important truths which might not otherwise have been brought to light. For instance, when they accused our blessed Lord of violating the Sabbath-day, they led him to mention with approbation David's eating of the shew-bread in a case of extreme necessity (an act which *we* could not otherwise have ventured to justify); and to expound as a general vindication of such conduct, that declaration of the prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." Here a similar accusation leads him to vindicate his own conduct on still higher principles; namely, his own equality with God the Father, and his right to dispense with laws instituted only for the benefit of man. True, this brought upon him still severer censure from his opponents, who judged him worthy of death for so arrogant and impious a claim. But they should have seen, from the miracle which he wrought,

* Matt. xii. 2—7.

that he was fully authorized to do what he had done, and that he was no other person than he professed himself to be.

To open this subject to you, I will shew,

I. How far the Jews were right in their interpretation of our Lord's words—

The expression which our Lord had used was, doubtless, exceeding strong^b—

[He called God *his* Father, evidently in a more emphatic and appropriate sense than any mere man could presume to do. The Jews at large regarded "God as their Father:" but no one had ever dared to arrogate to himself so near and peculiar a relation to God as our Lord did on this occasion. The very argument he used shewed in what sense he intended his words to be taken: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." My Father continues all his works of providence on the Sabbath-days, as well as on any other day: and I, by reason of my relation to him, possess the same right, and am free therefore from all imputation of blame in exercising it. This, I say, is the force of our Saviour's words; and if they be not so understood, they afford no vindication of himself whatever: and]

The Jews were right in their interpretation of them—

[They marked the emphatic manner in which Jesus had claimed that high and peculiar relation to the Father^d: they marked also the force of the argument founded on that relation: and they justly said, that he did arrogate to himself equality with God.

But they were wrong, exceeding wrong, in so hastily judging him a blasphemer. They, if they could not believe his words, had a vast abundance of works from which to judge, and which bore ample testimony to the truth of his assertions^e. In their hasty judgment, then, they were wrong; but in their interpretation of his words they were right: for our blessed Lord, instead of correcting their views as erroneous, confirmed them all as just and true. He proceeded to declare, that neither his Father nor himself acted apart from the other: that, on the contrary, there was a perfect unity of mind, and will, and purpose, and operation between them; nothing being done by the Father, but it was done by the Son likewise; that all men might honour the Son even as they honoured the Father; and

^b Compare Matt. xii. 8. with the text. • John viii. 41.

^d Ἰδιον Πατέρα, *his own*, in the most appropriate sense.

^e John x. 37, 38.

that, in fact, they who did not thus honour the Son did not truly honour the Father who had sent him^f.]

From hence we may see,

II. What construction *we* must put upon them—

If the Jews were right in their construction of our Lord's assertion, then we must regard his words,

1. As an avowal of his own proper divinity—

[When, on another occasion, our Lord had said, "I and my Father are one, the Jews took up stones to stone him;" and when our Lord said, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of them do ye stone me? they answered, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and *because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God^g.*" And truly, if he was not God, they were correct in their judgment. For what should we say if Moses or St. Paul had used such language, and founded on their relation to the Deity a right, a personal right, to supersede the laws which God himself had instituted? should we not have accounted *them* guilty of blasphemy? Then so was Christ, if he was no more than man. But, in fact, he spoke only what all the prophets had long since declared concerning him. "He, though a child born, and a son given, was the Mighty God^h;" "Jehovah's fellowⁱ," "Jehovah our Righteousness^k." And to the same effect all his holy Apostles also testify respecting him. Did the Father create, and does he also uphold, the world? This is true of the Son likewise; as St. Paul expressly asserts: "For by *him* were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and *by him all things consist^l.*" Again it is said, that "God hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things; *by whom also he hath made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, upholdeth all things by the word of his power^m.*" What a confirmation is here of those words of our Lord, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work!" What a confirmation, too, of the construction put upon them by the Jews, "that he made himself equal with Godⁿ!" Yes, truly, "being in the form of God, even in his incarnate state he

^f ver. 19—23.

^g John x. 30—33.

^h Isai. ix. 6.

ⁱ Zech. xiii. 7.

^k Jer. xxiii. 6.

^l Col. i. 16, 17.

^m Heb. i. 1, 3.

ⁿ ver. 19. *ταύτα καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ, He doth the same things in the same manner.*

thought it not robbery to be equal with God^o:" and the very words which were used by him on this occasion must be considered as an open avowal, on his part, that he was "God manifest in the flesh^p," even "God over all, blessed for evermore^q."]

2. As a warrant to us to rely upon him for all that we stand in need of—

"In him," as we have said, "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^r." "In him, too, as Mediator, there is all fulness treasured up^s," that "out of his fulness all his people should receive^t." He is constituted "Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all^u." Let us only see what he did, when on earth, to the bodies of men: *that* he now doeth to their souls — — — Yes, pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory, would he at this instant confer on us, if we would but seek them at his hands^v. Was he incessant in his labours, rendering even the Sabbath-day subservient to his great work? So will he now impart to our souls continually, and to the full extent of our necessities: and not only will he not intermit his labours on the Sabbath-day, but he will rather pursue them with redoubled energy on that holy day, sanctifying, rather than profaning, it by that blessed employment. In all this he will shew himself equal with the Father. He has said "Ye believe in God; believe also in me^v." And "every soul that believeth in him shall most assuredly be justified from all things^w," and "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation^x."]

From hence then LEARN,

1. To dismiss prejudice from your minds—

[The Jews were blinded by prejudice, and therefore could see nothing in the miracles of our Lord to justify their affiance in him. Had they been candid, and open to conviction, what blessings might they not have enjoyed! But they turned his every word and work into an occasion of offence, and augmented their own eternal condemnation by the very means used for their salvation. And thus it is that prejudice works at this day. Multitudes are so offended at something which they *account* wrong, that they have neither eyes nor ears for those things which are of the greatest possible importance to their souls. A departure from some outward observance, which they venerate, shall swallow up all the best qualities that the holiest of men can possess, all the best actions that he can

^o Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^p 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^q Rom. ix. 5.

^r Col. ii. 9.

^s Col. i. 19.

^t John i. 16.

^u Eph. i. 22, 23.

^v See Mark ii. 5—12. Rev. xxxi. 17, 18. Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

^w John xiv. 1.

^x Acts xiii. 39.

^y Isai. xlv. 17.

perform, and all the best instructions he can give. Only think, my beloved brethren, what the Jews lost on this occasion ; and how different their condition now is, in the eternal world, from what it might have been if they had obeyed the counsels of our Lord ; and you will see, that the advice I now give you is worthy of your deepest attention — — —]

2. To exercise a simple faith in Christ—

[In the days of his flesh, he inquired of persons who solicited his help, whether they believed him able to confer on them the desired boon : and so he now says to every one amongst you, “According to your faith be it unto you.” O what would he not do for us, if only we would call upon him ? Verily, if every one of us could flock around him, importuning mercy for our souls, “virtue at this very instant should go forth from him, to heal us all.” Think you, brethren, that he is less able or less willing now to hear us, than he was in the days of his flesh ? No, indeed : even “a touch of the hem of his garment” should be sufficient for the effecting all that our necessities require.]

MDCXXVI.

CHRIST'S VINDICATION OF HIS OWN DIVINE CHARACTER.

John v. 21—23. *As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them ; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son : that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.*

AMONGST the various beauties by which the Holy Scriptures are distinguished, we cannot but notice the artless simplicity with which the most sublime doctrines are delivered : they are not introduced with studied care, as they would be in human compositions ; but arise incidentally, as it were, out of things which have but a remote connexion with them. Our blessed Lord had healed an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and had bidden him to take up his bed whereon he had lain, and walk away with it. The Jews, instead of glorifying God on the occasion, accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath, and sought to kill him for having wrought this miracle on the

Sabbath-day. Our Lord, in vindication of himself, said, that he did no more than what his heavenly Father did; for his Father carried on his works both of providence and grace on the Sabbath, as well as on other days; and that he himself did the same. At this answer the Jews took still greater offence. They saw that Jesus arrogated to himself a peculiar relation to God, even such a relation as was in effect an assumption of equality with God^a. Hence "they sought the more to kill him," on account of what they conceived to be the summit of impiety and blasphemy. Jesus was now compelled to answer for himself on these grounds: and he told the Jews, that though they were correct in supposing him to claim an equality with God, they were mistaken in imagining that he therefore set up himself against God: on the contrary, there was a perfect union of sentiment and affection, of will and operation, between them; and neither did his Father, nor he, do any thing, without the most perfect concurrence and co-operation of the other: and so far was this from interfering with God's honour, that it was purposely arranged in the eternal counsels, in order that God might be honoured in the person of his Son: nor would God consider himself as honoured by any one, who would not honour him in the precise way which he himself had appointed.

Thus, out of this perverse conduct of the Jews arose an assertion and vindication of the divinity of Christ: they forced him to vindicate his apparent violation of the Sabbath, and then to maintain the ground he had assumed in his vindication of it: and thus we are indebted to their perverseness for one of the clearest and most important statements in all the sacred volume.

Let us now, in discoursing on these assertions of our Lord, consider,

I. The account he gives of his own character—

Had the Jews been mistaken in what they

^a ver. 18.

supposed to be the scope of our Lord's assertions, he would have set them right: he would have told them plainly, that he did not intend to claim equality with God. But, instead of intimating that they had misunderstood his meaning, our Lord acknowledged that he did claim an equality with God; and, in confirmation of that claim, he asserted that a Divine authority belonged to him, both essentially, as God, and officially, as Mediator.

1. Essentially, as God—

[It is undoubtedly the Divine prerogative to "kill and to make alive"^b: nor is it possible for any creature to restore to life that which is really dead. But the Lord Jesus Christ "quickeneth whom he will." As the Father had, by the instrumentality of his prophets, raised some to life, so Christ declared, that *he* would raise some by *his own* power. The persons, the time, the manner, were altogether at the disposal of his own will, by which alone he would be regulated in the dispensing of his favours. Moreover, he "quickeneth also the souls of men when dead in trespasses and sins;" and administers this gift also according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.

Would any mere creature have dared to arrogate to himself such a power as this? or would Jesus have given such an answer as this, if he have not designed to maintain his claim to an equality with God?]

2. Officially, as Mediator—

[When it was determined in the Divine counsels that the Son of God should assume our nature, it was determined also that the government of the universe, and of the Church more especially, should be committed to his hands; and that he should judge the world whom he had redeemed by his blood^c. This, though primarily belonging, as it were, to the Father, was delegated to the Son, *because* he had assumed our nature^d, and because it was expedient that he who had "purchased the Church with his blood" should be empowered in his own person both to reward his friends and punish his enemies. But this office could not be executed by him, if he were not omniscient: he must know, not only every thought, word, and action, of all mankind from the beginning of the world to the end of it, but every possible circumstance that can at all tend to determine the precise quality of each. In a word, to exercise this office, he must be the omniscient God.

^b Deut. xxxii. 39. ^c Acts x. 42. and xvii. 31 ^d ver 27.

Judge then, whether in claiming this office he did not yet further confirm the suspicion of the Jews, that he affected an equality with God. It is not to be conceived, that, if this had not been his design, he would have answered in such a way : for, if he was not really and truly God, the whole tendency of his answer was to mislead their judgment, and to justify their accusations against him as an impious blasphemer.]

But, not contented with establishing his equality with the Father, he informs them of,

II. The regard which, in that character, he demands—

Though he affected not the honour that cometh of man*, yet he could not possibly relinquish the honour which belonged to him both in his personal and official capacity: he could no more absolve the people from their allegiance to him as God, that he could cease to be God. He therefore shews them,

1. The extent of that honour which he requires—

[Whatever honour is due unto the Father, that Jesus claims as due unto himself; and he requires "all men" to pay it to him. Is God to be adored on account of his infinite perfections? Is he to be the one great object of our faith and love? Are we to confide in him under all circumstances, to obey him at all events, to delight ourselves in him at all seasons, even though death be threatened as the recompence of our fidelity? Such adoration, such faith, such love, such confidence, such obedience, are the unalienable right of the Lord Jesus: and it is particularly to be observed, that the putting of this honour upon the Lord Jesus was the very end and design of God the Father, when he delegated to the Son the office of governing and judging the world; "He committed all judgment to the Son, *that all men might honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.*"]

2. The necessity of paying it to him—

[It might be thought sufficient to honour the Father: and so it was whilst the Father alone was known: but when he had revealed himself in the person of Christ, and "made all his glory to shine in his face;" when "in Christ he had reconciled the world unto himself," and had "treasured up all fulness in Christ," and invested him with "all power in heaven and earth" for the completion of the great work that had been assigned him; then he demanded, that all men should honour him *in the person of Christ*: and, if any should refuse so to honour him, he would reject their persons, and abhor their offerings:

* ver. 41.

yea, whatever reverence they might profess towards him, he would deal with them as rebels against his authority, and as contemners of his mercy.

Thus our Lord obviates the great objections which might be supposed to lie against the validity of his claim. It might have been thought, that the Father would be jealous of his own honour, and consider any communication of Divine glory to his Son as an infringement of his own peculiar rights. But, behold! the very contrary is here declared: for, not only is that very communication designed by God, but all honour that is not accompanied with that communication is abhorred by him.]

Surely we may see from hence,

1. How defective are *the views of the generality*—

[The religion of the generality is only Judaism divested of its rites and ceremonies. They acknowledge a God, who, they think, has given us commandments; in obeying which we shall secure his favour, and by disobedience to which we shall incur his displeasure. It is true, if you begin to speak of Christ, they will acknowledge all that the Gospel relates concerning him: but they make very little account of him in their religious system. How different are their views from those suggested in the text! There we see, that Christ is the fountain of all spiritual life; and that he dispenses life to men according to his sovereign will and pleasure. There we see, that to honour Christ is the only true way of honouring the Father. There we see, also, what unsearchable riches of consolation are treasured up for the believer; in that the very Person who bought him with his blood, is set over all things both in heaven and earth; and the very Person who paid that ransom for him, and renewed and sanctified him by his grace, shall judge him in the last day. Ah! what do nominal Christians lose by their ignorance of Christ! Dear brethren, know that Christ is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" in God's account; and that, if you would be saved by him, you must make him your "All in all."]

2. How defective is *the practice of us all*—

[We have spoken a little of the honour due unto the Father: but if we would have a fuller apprehension of it, let us contemplate the honour that is paid to him in heaven: let us imagine what are the feelings of all the angelic hosts, and of all the spirits of the just made perfect — — — Such then should be our views, and such our feelings towards the Lord Jesus Christ. We should begin our heaven upon earth. True it is, that when we speak of such a state, men will immediately begin to caution you against excess: they will tell

you also that such a state would be incompatible with the necessary affairs of life. But where does God caution us against excess in religion, *provided our religion be of a right kind?* or what are those affairs which could not be conducted, if all men possessed the highest measure of true religion? Were Joseph, David, Daniel, impeded in their temporal duties by their religion? Or is there any one relation of life which will not be filled to more advantage by one who possesses true piety? The true reason why men so decry religion is, that they feel themselves condemned when they behold it exhibited in the conduct of the godly; and the less of such light they behold, the more quiet they hope to be in the prosecution of their evil ways. But we must not regard the cavils of men, or put them in competition with the commands of God. We know full well how all the ransomed of the Lord are occupied in singing praises "to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb:" What forbids then that we should be so occupied now? It is our duty, our interest, and our happiness, to "follow the Lord fully:" and I pray God we may also follow him, and delight ourselves in him; that when we are dismissed from the body, and translated to the realms of bliss, we may change our place and our company, but not our employment!]

MDCXXVII.

THE BELIEVER'S HAPPY STATE.

John v. 24. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

THAT there will be a future judgment, we all know: and that Jesus Christ is appointed to be the Judge, is also generally acknowledged. But what his rule of judgment will be is very imperfectly understood. That our *works* will be inquired into, and form the ground of decision either against us or in our favour, is admitted on all hands: but that our *principles* will be scrutinized, and enter most essentially into the consideration of our Judge in determining our eternal state, is far from being generally expected or conceived. Yet *that* is declared by the Judge himself, even by our blessed Lord, and in the

plainest terms. Having told us that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son," he adds, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Now, from *the manner in which this truth is affirmed*, we see at once both the *certainly* and *importance* of it: and therefore, with confidence, I will set before you,

I. The character here described—

Of course, our Lord did not mean to say, that all who *heard* his discourses, but that all who *so heard them as to make them the rule of their faith and practice*, would be saved. Consider then,

1. What the great subject of our Lord's discourses was—

[He represented himself as sent by God the Father to expiate upon the cross the sins of men; and "to bring in an everlasting righteousness," whereby all who should believe in him might be saved — — —]

2. What must of necessity be experienced by all who should receive it aright—

[They must feel themselves sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation. They must be convinced of the utter impossibility of ever reconciling themselves to God by any works of their own. They must see Christ to be the true Messiah, sent by God to be the Saviour of the world. To him they must apply themselves, and to God the Father through him; having no hope but in his blood and righteousness, nor any plea whatever but his obedience unto death. In the daily habit of their minds they must come to God by him with deep humiliation and with fervent prayer; and must consecrate themselves to God as his obedient servants, determined to follow, without hesitation or reserve, his revealed will.]

Such, in few words, is the character described.

We notice,

II. The blessedness connected with it—

This is set forth as it exists,

1. In prospect—

["Never" shall a person of this character "come into condemnation." However much he may have provoked the

Divine displeasure in former times, he now enjoys "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." However God's anger may have waxed hot against him at a former period, "it is turned away from him now," and all "his iniquities are cast into the very depths of the sea." He has nothing to fear. Being "found in Christ," "there is no condemnation to him:" on the contrary, he is "presented faultless before God," and "stands before him without spot or blemish"— — —]

2. In possession—

["He" already "*hath* eternal life," both in title and in actual possession. He can claim eternal life, as given to him by covenant and by oath. Numberless are the promises made to those who "lay hold on God's covenant;" and he may confidently rest upon them, expecting every one of them to be fulfilled in its season: for "it is an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure:" and sooner should heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it should ever fail.

But it is not a mere title to it that he possesses; for it is already begun in his soul. He has actually experienced, so far as it respects his soul, a transition similar to that which will hereafter take place in reference to the body. He once lay, as it were, in the grave, altogether "dead in trespasses and sins:" but now "he has passed from death unto life." A new principle of life has been infused into him; so that he has new views, new desires, new pursuits, and new habits: and is altogether "a new creature in Christ Jesus." "He lives no longer to himself, but unto him who died for him, and rose again."]

The whole of this subject being so plain and obvious, I have not judged it necessary to enter very fully into it in a way of discussion, that I may have the more time to improve it in a way of APPLICATION.

Two things, then, I earnestly request of you, my beloved brethren:

1. Inquire carefully into the state of your souls before God—

[Inquire whether, like Mary, you are sitting at the feet of Jesus, and receiving with obedient regard his every word. Say whether his *written* word be your daily study and delight; and whether you diligently apply to yourselves his *preached* word, for the correcting of every sinful habit, and for advancing the life of God within you — — —

Inquire whether, in obedience to his word, you are relying solely upon him, and coming to the Father through him, and pleading his merits and mediation as the only grounds of your hope.

Carry your inquiry yet further; and see whether your transition from death to life be so clear and manifest, that it admits not of any reasonable doubt. Are you "crucified with Christ" to all the vanities of this world? and are you "living entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," "receiving every thing out of his fulness," and improving every thing to his glory?

If these things be indeed your daily experience, then is all the blessedness annexed to such a state your assured portion. But consider, I pray you, the sad alternative. If these things be in you, "you shall not come into condemnation:" but if you have only the appearance of them, and not the reality, then does condemnation await you at your departure hence; yea, our blessed Lord expressly tells you, that "you are condemned already, and that the wrath of God abideth on you^a." What a fearful thought is this! How can you bear to live in such a state, or endure even to have your state a matter of doubt or suspense? If it were at an earthly tribunal only that condemnation awaited you, it were a tremendous prospect: but to be condemned by the Judge of quick and dead, and be sentenced by him to everlasting misery, is so terrible, that I wonder the apprehension of it does not utterly overwhelm you. My heart's desire and prayer to God for you, brethren, is, that not one of you may be ever subjected to such a doom as this.]

2. Pursue with all earnestness the blessedness that has now been set before you—

[Surely it is worth seeking for, and will richly repay all that you can either do or suffer to obtain it. Were you urged to commence a life of suffering, such as the devotees of idols inflict upon themselves, you might well undertake the painful task, and submit to all that could be inflicted on you. But we call you to nothing of this kind. We invite you only to come to Christ, and to "hear his word, and to believe in the Father who hath sent him:" and shall this be deemed hard? Even in this present life, the blessedness of having a title to heaven, and the very life of heaven begun in your souls, would richly repay you: how much more, then, will all the glory and felicity of God himself, so far as a creature can enjoy it, recompense your labours? Be in earnest, brethren. There is nothing under heaven worth seeking after in comparison of

^a John iii. 18, 36.

this. Let "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom:" and in dependence on it, go to the Father, and "lay hold upon him," and remind him of his covenant: yea, take all "his exceeding great and precious promises," and plead them before him: and see whether it shall be in vain to call upon God. No, indeed: He will be merciful unto you: he will seal a sense of his pardoning love upon your soul; and make himself over to you as your God and portion for ever. Call to mind the assurance given you in my text: "Verily, verily, I say unto you." Thus shall it be done to the believing soul. What more can you want to comfort and encourage you? Only come to God in his appointed way, and all this blessedness shall be yours.]

MDCXXVIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

John v. 28, 29. *The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

FROM the resurrection of Christ we may infer, that we ourselves also shall rise from the dead. Indeed, he is called "the first-fruits of them that slept;" and therefore we may expect that there will be a complete harvest in due time. To this effect also we are informed in the words before us: from which we shall be naturally led to consider,

I. The certainty of the resurrection—

By many it has been "thought incredible that God should raise the dead." But "their error proceeds from not knowing the Scriptures, or the power of God^a." Consider then,

1. What the Scriptures speak concerning it—

[They have recorded many instances wherein the dead have been raised^b — — — Even in the Old Testament there

^a Matt. xxii. 23, 29.

^b 1 Kings xvii. 17—23. 2 Kings iv. 32—37. Luke vii. 12—15. John xi. 43, 44. Acts ix. 36—41. and especially Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

are not wanting many strong intimations of it* — — — and in the New, it is declared in every page^d — — —]

2. The power of God to effect it—

[See what God *has done* : look at the whole creation ; and then ask, Whether He who formed the universe out of nothing, cannot as easily re-unite our scattered atoms (*whatever changes they may have undergone*), and restore to every one his own body? Yes ; it was the voice of Jesus that spake the universe into existence ; and that same voice will call forth into renewed existence all that are mouldered in their graves. See, moreover, what our God *is doing*. We forbear to notice the succession of day and night, and summer and winter ; or the reviviscency of birds and insects after long intervals of suspended animation. We call your attention rather to the changes wrought upon the seed that is cast into the earth : it dies, and rises again, in appearance different, in reality the same. What more striking image of the resurrection could be presented before our eyes? Surely in this we have a pattern of the change that shall be accomplished in us at the last day ; and a pledge that "our bodies, which are sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonour, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory."]

As no doubt can remain upon our minds respecting the certainty of the resurrection, let us next consider,

II. The issue of it—

There will be an immense difference between the states of different men—

[Who can conceive all that is implied in "a resurrection to life?" If in some respects we may borrow images from the present life in order to illustrate it, in other respects that new and heavenly life will form a perfect contrast to all that we now experience. It is true, that all the faculties of our bodies shall be employed in the service of our God : but it is also true, that they shall never clog the soul in its operations ; their capacities shall be exceedingly enlarged ; they shall never be subject to weariness or want of any kind ; they shall be as full of activity and blessedness as the soul itself — — —

On the other hand, Who shall declare what is the full import of "a resurrection to damnation?" We are shocked at the very sound of the word "damnation:" how much more

* Exod. iii. 6. with Mark xii. 26, 27. Isai. xxvi. 19. Hos. xiii. 14. with 1 Cor. xv. 54, 55. and especially Job xix. 25—27.

^d *passim*. See 1 Cor. xv.

should we be so, if we knew all that is comprehended in it! It is in vain to attempt to describe the anguish which the body shall endure in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. But we are persuaded that the soul will bitterly bewail the necessity it is under of being re-united to that body, which once, instead of governing it aright, it pampered and obeyed — — — And its misery will be fearfully augmented by the increased capacity of anguish which it will derive from its union with the body — — —]

This difference will correspond with, and be founded on, their moral characters—

[The Scriptures uniformly declare the connexion that subsists between our present conduct and our future state. Nor need we be afraid of stating the truth precisely in the same manner, provided we bear in mind what is implied “in doing good, and doing evil.” To do good is, to serve God cheerfully and without reserve. Now the very first “commandment of God is, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” This at once lays the axe to the root of all self-righteousness; and necessitates us to look unto Christ both for righteousness and strength. And we do not hesitate to say, that all who serve God in conformity with this fundamental principle, shall have a resurrection to life.

If, on the contrary, we “do evil,” *neglecting this adorable Saviour*, and living to ourselves rather than to him, we shall certainly “come forth to everlasting shame and contempt*.”

Each of these truths is so firmly asserted in the Scriptures, that no doubt of them can be entertained†. We want only to have them brought home with more feeling to our hearts.]

ADDRESS—

[Consider for which of these states you are preparing. You may delay, under the idea that the time will never come: but “the hour is coming,” as fast as the wings of time can bring it forward. Let not your preparation for it be deferred: for life is uncertain; and as death finds you, so will judgment find you. If you live and die obedient followers of Christ, you will be happy. If you rely not on him, or devote not yourselves unreservedly to him, it will not be in the power of God himself to save you: for “he cannot deny himself;” and he has expressly said, that all such persons shall have “a resurrection to damnation.”]

* Dan. xii. 2.

† Gal. vi. 7, 8. Rom. ii. 6—10.

MDCXXIX.

JOHN BAPTIST'S CHARACTER.

John v. 35. *He was a burning and a shining light.*

IT might well be expected that the advent of the Messiah should be marked by such concurrent circumstances, as should carry conviction, to every dispassionate mind, that the person assuming that character was indeed the person predicted by Moses and the prophets. Accordingly we find, that there was a person sent as the forerunner of our blessed Lord, to prepare his way, and to bear witness to him. This person was John the Baptist^a, himself a most extraordinary man; so extraordinary, that the Jewish rulers doubted whether *he* was not the Messiah: but he disclaimed all pretensions to that honour; and rested satisfied with executing the office which had been assigned him^b. To this man's testimony our blessed Lord appealed; at the same time testifying respecting him, that "he was a burning and a shining light."

In confirmation of this assertion respecting John, I will,

I. Point out the peculiar excellencies of his character—

Of course I cannot enter into all the parts of his character: I will content myself with specifying three things which pre-eminently distinguished him:

1. The clearness of his knowledge—

[In this he excelled all who went before him. Many prophets had spoken plainly of ^cChrist, declaring both his sufferings, and the glory that should follow them. But they spake of Christ at a distance of several hundreds of years, and understood not the prophecies which they were inspired to record^d. But John pointed out the Messiah himself, and directed the people to Jesus, as "that Lamb of God, who, by the sacrifice of himself, should take away the sins of the world^e." In this act, not only was the typical nature of the

^a John i. 6—8.

^b 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

^c John i. 19—27.

^d John i. 29.

Mosaic offerings distinctly recognized; but the Lord Jesus Christ was made known as fulfilling in his own person what had been so long shadowed forth in the daily sacrifices. Thus did he "give the knowledge of salvation to the people for the remission of their sins*:" a knowledge which pre-eminently exalted John above all the prophets that had gone before him[†].]

2. The ardour of his zeal—

[The first thirty years of his life he spent in retirement, and in the closest walk with God. And, when he entered on his office as the Messiah's harbinger, he came in the most self-denying way, "having his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; whilst his meat was locusts and wild honey[‡]." As to the manner in which he executed his office, nothing could exceed his fidelity. To all persons, of whatever rank, he preached with undaunted boldness; and declared, as far as he was able, the whole counsel of God. When many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to his baptism, he, well knowing their hypocrisy, addressed them in these animated and pungent strains: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire[§]." Even before Herod himself did he manifest the same undaunted courage; telling him plainly, that "it was not lawful for him to live in an incestuous commerce with his brother Philip's wife;" and exhorting him without delay to put her away^{||}. He well knew at what peril he exercised this fidelity: but no personal consideration could induce him to withhold, or modify, this salutary counsel. Herein, then, he approved himself to be a prophet indeed, and rendered himself a pattern for ministers in all ages.]

3. The holiness of his life—

["He was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb[¶]." And so holily did he demean himself, that Herod could not but reverence and stand in awe of him, and, in many instances, comply with his admonitions^{||}. In the whole of his ministrations his attention was particularly turned to the advancement of *practical* religion; enforcing upon all

* Luke i. 76, 77.

† Luke vii. 26—28.

‡ Matt. iii. 4.

§ Matt. iii. 7—10.

|| Mark vi. 17, 18.

¶ Luke i. 15.

|| Mark vi. 20.

those peculiar duties which their situation called for, or which their peculiar circumstances tempted them to neglect. Those who were under good impressions from his ministry, consulted him, as might be expected, what they should do in order to evince the efficacy of the principles they had imbibed from him. "When some asked him, What shall we do? He answered, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none: and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." When publicans (*i.e.* tax-gatherers) made the same inquiry to them he said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." And when soldiers requested the same information, he said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages^m." Thus he shewed how anxious he was that all should bring religion into their daily practice; not suffering it to evaporate in mere sentiments and professions, but carrying it into effect, in the whole of their life and conversation.]

Having thus set before you the character of this blessed man, I will,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

Far, very far, in general, are men from admiring such a character as this —

[By many, even of this holy man it was said, "He hath a devil." The Rulers and Pharisees rejected his counsel altogether, and would not submit to his baptismⁿ." And though many were well affected towards him, and "rejoiced in his sight, they rejoiced in it only for a season:" and at last he fell a sacrifice to his fidelity. Thus, at this time, if a man were to resemble him, he would find but little acceptance with an ungodly world. In fact, he would by many be thought to be more under the influence of demoniacal delusion than of sound reason and solid piety. His deadness to the world would be regarded as most contemptible fanaticism, and his faithfulness in reproving sin would be condemned as most insufferable presumption.]

Nevertheless, I cannot but earnestly commend his character to the imitation of you all—

[From ministers in particular his example demands the most respectful attention. Certainly the same degree of austerity that he practised is not necessary now. Our Lord has shewn, that under this new dispensation a greater measure of liberty is allowed, provided we be duly careful that in no instance it degenerate into licentiousness. But with respect to an entire

^m Luke iii. 10—14.

ⁿ Luke vii. 30.

devotion of the soul to God, and a faithful discharge of our ministry, there is to be no difference between us and John: we must be as faithful in our ministrations, and as holy in our lives, as he — — — But to Christians of every class is this bright example applicable. Every follower of Christ is called to be a "light in the world;" yea, "a burning and a shining light." His soul, inflamed with fire from heaven, should burn with holy love; nor should the fire, once kindled on the altar of his heart, ever be suffered to go out*. To all around him he should "hold forth the word of life;" and so "cause his light to shine before men, that all who behold it may be constrained to glorify their Father who is in heaven" — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Be "willing, then, to rejoice in his light"—

[Surely such a ministry as his, so instructive, so faithful, so convincing, is an unspeakable blessing to every one that enjoys it. And such a ministry we have, not in him only, but the holy Apostles, yea, and in multitudes of the present day. Shew, then, that you duly appreciate the labours of these men; and "be followers of them, as they are of Christ" — — —]

2. Let your joy in that light be both abiding and progressive—

[Of the myriads who were impressed by the ministry of John, there were very, very few who became steadfast in the faith. All the Disciples of John, and Jesus, and his twelve Apostles, and his seventy Disciples, amounted to no more than five hundred, after the ascension of our Lord. The great mass of those who appeared hopeful, were turned aside by fear, or by the vanities of this sinful world. Be on your guard then, brethren, against every thing that may produce this sad effect on you — — — and beg of God that your "path may be like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."]

* Matt. v. 14.

† Lev. vi. 12.

‡ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

§ Matt. v. 16.

MDCXXX.

CHRIST'S APPEAL TO THE SCRIPTURES.

John v. 39. *Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*

WHEN our Lord professed himself to be the promised Messiah, and claimed an authority equal to

that of Almighty God, it was necessary that he should bring abundant evidence of his Divine mission, and prove, by testimonies of the most unquestionable kind, his title to the honour he assumed. Nor was he backward to give all the proof which the occasion required. He appealed to the testimony of John the Baptist, whom the whole Jewish nation considered as a prophet, and whose testimony therefore ought to have great weight with them. He appealed also to his own miracles, which were so great and numerous as to be in themselves an indubitable evidence that God was with him. He further appealed to the testimony which his heavenly Father also had given to him at his baptism, both by an audible voice from heaven, and by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him. Lastly, he appealed to the Holy Scriptures, which the Jews themselves received as the word of God, and which bore testimony to him; even such testimony as would be found to agree exactly with his person and character in every respect. As these had existed for centuries, and might be compared with all that he had either done or taught, their testimony must be unexceptionable, and must carry conviction to every mind.

From the words before us we shall be led to notice,

I. The transcendent excellency of the Holy Scriptures—

Two things are here spoken respecting them :

1. They reveal unto us eternal life—

[Reason never could suffice for discovering the immortality of the soul. Philosophy never enabled any man so to establish the certainty of a future state, as to render it an article of general belief, or to produce any considerable influence on the minds of those around him. Many have reasoned well upon the subject, and spoken what approximated to the truth: but they never could with certainty affirm a future state of rewards and punishments; much less could they tell us how to avoid the one, and obtain the other. But the Scriptures have drawn aside the veil and shewn us that this present world is introductory to another, in which men shall exist to all eternity. The Old Testament, it is true, speaks but darkly on this point: yet was it sufficiently clear to impress the Jewish nation at large

with a persuasion that both the souls and bodies of men should live in a future state of existence. The Sadducees, who were the free-thinkers of the day, were exceptions to the general rule. The national creed in these respects accorded with what was more fully revealed under the Christian dispensation. "By the Gospel, life and immortality have been fully brought to light;" yea, and the way of salvation been clearly revealed: so that we who live under its benign influence, do not merely *think*, but *know*, that there is for those who believe in Christ, a salvation treasured up, a "salvation with eternal glory." In this respect therefore a very child amongst us is better instructed than all the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome.]

2. They testify of Christ Jesus our Lord—

["The testimony of Christ," we are told, "was the spirit of prophecy" from first to last. The testimony which the Scriptures have borne to Christ is *clear*; not like the ambiguous answers of heathen oracles, which were so formed, as to be, without any great difficulty, accommodated to any event; but clear and precise, and incapable of any other interpretation than that which, upon the very face of it, it professed. Take, for instance, the prophecy relating to the time and place of our Saviour's birth; and it was as much understood before his advent as afterwards, even by those who had not the grace to welcome his arrival. It was also *copious*, so that no one thing which could by any means be desired to designate the Messiah's advent, was omitted. His person, his work, his offices were all described and shadowed forth: the nature of his salvation was fully delineated, and the extent of his kingdom declared. Nothing was left for any reasonable man to desire either for the rectifying of his views, or the ascertaining that those views were correct. It was in the highest possible degree *convincing*. The prophecies concerning him were so minute that they could never have entered into the mind of an uninspired man, nor could by any possibility have been accomplished by any contrivance or conspiracy of men. Though a Jew, our Lord Jesus was to die, not a Jewish, but a Roman death, the death of the cross. Yet in his crucifixion he was not to suffer all that was usually associated with that punishment; for "not a bone of him was to be broken." On the other hand, there were to be inflicted on him indignities, never associated with that punishment in other instances; he was to be scourged before his crucifixion, and to be pierced to the heart with a spear after it. The very taunts with which he was to be insulted on the cross were accurately and literally foretold; as was also the cruelty in offering him vinegar in the midst of all his torments. The division of one of his garments, and the casting of lots upon the other, were among the circumstances which no human being could

have divined, and which no impostor would have ventured to predict. And who would ever have imagined, that one so ignominiously treated in his death, should yet "have his grave with the rich?" The very price which was to be paid for his blood, together with the subsequent application of it in the purchase of a potter's field, and the untimely death of the person that betrayed him, these, and a great variety of other circumstances equally minute, prove beyond a doubt that Jesus was the person testified of, and that the testimony borne of him was divine.

Had the different witnesses been contemporaneous, it might have been supposed possible that these infinitely diversified circumstances should have been devised and executed by means of a well-concerted conspiracy. But the witnesses lived in ages and places far distant from each other, even many hundreds of years apart: yet did all the prophets so harmonize with each other in all their various predictions, that no room is left for doubt but that they were wholly unconnected with each other, and altogether under the direction and influence of the Spirit of God. Thus whether we consider the testimony itself, or the witnesses by whom it was delivered, we can have no doubt but that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.]

Such then being the excellency of the Scriptures, let us contemplate,

II. Our duty in relation to them—

This is clear and manifest:

1. We must "search the Scriptures" for ourselves—

[Possessing such Divine records, we should apply ourselves diligently to the study of them. We should search them *with simplicity of mind*, desiring to learn from them the will and mind of God, and determining through grace to comply with them in every respect, *receiving implicitly* whatsoever they *declare*, and *obeying without reserve* whatsoever they *command*. We must not bring to them any of our own prejudices whereby to judge of them, or any thing of our own passions wherewith to limit them. We must bring to them the *simplicity* of a little child, submitting our own wisdom to the wisdom of our God, and our own will to the will of God. In fact, we must desire to know God's will *in order that we may do it*. Like Samuel we must lend to every word of God a willing and obedient ear, saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." We have a most instructive example in the conduct of the blind man whom Jesus healed. Jesus asked him, "Believest thou in the Son of God?" The man

immediately replied, "Who is he, Lord, *that I may believe on him?*" The whole bias of his soul was towards his God; and his desire of instruction was for the sole purpose of glorifying God by the strictest possible conformity to his holy will. And if we resemble him in these respects, we are assured, that we shall be enabled to "know of every doctrine whether it be of God*."

Of course, we must prosecute our search *with all diligence*. The very word, "Search," imports, that we should sift every word, as miners sift the earth in the pursuit of precious jewels; and must exercise all our faculties about it, as dogs do in the pursuit of their prey^b. A slight and cursory perusal of the Scriptures will be of little use; nor will a formal habit of reading, as some do, the psalms and lessons for the day, answer the ends for which we are to read the Scriptures. There must be in us a habit of weighing every sentiment, and of imploring God to convey to our minds its true import. Diligence of *itself* will not avail for the full understanding of the Scriptures. We must have the eyes of our understanding opened by the Spirit of God; and his aid will only be given to us in answer to fervent prayer. We must, in fact, never approach the Scriptures without that petition of holy David, "Open thou mine eyes, O Lord, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Hence these two, diligence and prayer, are united by Solomon as equally necessary for the attainment of divine knowledge: "If thou apply thine heart to understanding, yea, if thou *criest after* knowledge, and *lifest up thy voice for* understanding; if thou *seekest* her as silver, and *searchest for her as for hid treasures*; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding*."

But in particular we must search the Scriptures *with a more especial view to derive from them the knowledge of Christ*. As they all testify of him, so it should be our most anxious care to see and learn what they do testify. A mere critical knowledge of Scripture, though good, will bring with it no saving benefit. Nor will an historical knowledge of Scripture, no, nor even a speculative knowledge of its doctrines and its precepts, avail us any thing. It is the knowledge of Christ, and that alone, that will convey to our souls the blessings of salvation. "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." In the great mystery of a crucified Saviour "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge:" and "in comprehending the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ as revealed in that mystery, we

* John vii. 17.

^b Ερευνᾶτε.

° Prov. ii. 3—6.

shall be filled with all the fulness of God." My dear brethren, even good people do not sufficiently bear this in mind. Men, in going into the fields, obtain, for the most part, that which they are in pursuit of. One obtains health, and another pleasure; but it is the botanist only that acquires the science of herbs. So in perusing the Holy Scriptures, whatever else men may obtain, none will obtain the knowledge of Christ in all the glory of his person, the extent of his love, and the fulness and excellency of his salvation, but those who go to them with this express view, and bend all the force of their minds towards the attainment of them. You will remember that the Cherubim upon the mercy-seat were in a bending posture looking down upon the ark, that peculiar symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ as mediating between God and us. This St. Peter explains to us, declaring respecting all the wonders of salvation revealed to us in the Scriptures, that "the angels are desiring to look into them⁴." Be ye then, brethren, in this posture whenever ye take the sacred volume into your hands, and, like the Apostle Paul, seek to your dying hour to know more and more of Christ, "of the power of his resurrection, and of the fellowship of his sufferings:" for, in proportion as "ye behold the glory of Christ, ye shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord⁵."]

2. Endeavour to diffuse the knowledge of them to the utmost of your power—

[The command to "search them" evidently implies the duty of promoting in others also the knowledge of them. In this respect the Christian world has done well in spreading the Holy Scriptures both at home and abroad, to an extent altogether unprecedented. And in the work of translating the Holy Scriptures, and of sending forth missionaries to diffuse the knowledge of them, this age has also excelled all that have ever gone before it⁶ — — —

But who would ever have thought that a great part of the Christian world should set themselves against the circulation of the Scriptures, and should actually prohibit their people from reading them? Yet this is done by the Church of Rome in every quarter of the world. The Governors of that Church will not suffer the word of God to be read, except by their special permission, and with their corrupt glosses, which in ten thousand instances obscure and falsify its meaning. And what shall we say to this? I stand amazed at such conduct in a Church professing itself the Church of Christ. I know

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 12.

⁵ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

⁶ If this be a subject for a *Bible Society*, or a *Mission Society*, the line of discussion must be suited to the occasion.

not whether is the greater, the impiety or the cruelty of such conduct. The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Search the Scriptures." 'No,' says the Papist; 'ye shall not search them: I will not even suffer them to be in your possession: and if they be given you, I will wrest them out of your hands.' But if it be replied, "In them we have eternal life;" 'I care not for that,' says the Papist; 'ye shall perish, rather than I will suffer you to read that book.' 'But Christ has said, "They testify of me;" and I want to know what they testify.' 'I care not for that,' says the Papist; 'I will not suffer you to know what they testify: you shall not hear their testimony any farther than I please to inform you of it, and then you shall know it only as corrupted and falsified by me.' What such priests will answer at the bar of judgment, God alone knows: but I fear their doom will be very terrible, seeing that they will have to answer for the souls of thousands whom they have kept in the sorest bondage, and blinded to their eternal ruin. Judge then ye, brethren, whether ye should not endeavour to counteract this impious tyranny, and to diffuse the knowledge of salvation through the perishing millions of your fellow-subjects. I mean not that you should do this in a spirit of opposition, but in a spirit of love. And as the legislature at their request has made them partakers with you in all civil and political privileges, so do ye, unsought and unsolicited, labour to impart unto them the full enjoyment of your spiritual privileges, in the knowledge of Christ, and of his salvation^g.]

^g Preached for the Society of *Scripture Readers* in Dublin, March 1830.

MDCXXXI.

THE TRUE REASON OF MEN'S DESTRUCTION.

John v. 40. *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*

TO doubt whether men wish to be saved or not, may appear absurd. No man would hesitate to answer such a question in the affirmative. But though every one would prefer happiness to misery, they are but few who really prefer the way that leads to happiness. The text may be addressed to the generality amongst ourselves with the same propriety as to those who rejected the invitations of our Lord

in the days of old. We shall take occasion from these words to inquire,

I. What are the benefits of coming unto Christ—

To “come to Christ” is a frequent expression in the Scriptures :

Let us first consider what is implied in this act—

[It imports not an outward attendance on his person, but an inward affiance on him for salvation. It imports a coming to him *with humility* as sinners — — — *with faith* as to the only Saviour — — — and *with love* as to our rightful Lord and Master* — — —]

From a due performance of this act the most inestimable benefits will arise—

[Temporal, spiritual, eternal life will flow from it. Even the *temporal comforts* of life are enjoyed by none so much as by him who believes in Christ; nor is there any other person who holds them by so sure a tenure^b. He cannot fail of possessing them as far as they will conduce to his spiritual welfare. But *spiritual life* is a far richer blessing; and this is the believer's assured portion. His soul shall be endued with a new and vital principle of grace^c. Christ himself will live in him and be his life^d. As Lazarus when raised was enabled to perform the functions of animal life, of which he had been rendered, for a season, incapable, so shall the believer's soul, which was once dead in trespasses and sins, be quickened to the discharge of all the duties and offices of the spiritual life. He shall enjoy sweet communion with God in secret, and find his supreme delight in fulfilling his blessed will. The man who thus daily comes to Christ for righteousness and strength is incomparably the happiest man on earth; but his happiness does not terminate with his present existence. No: he shall possess also *eternal life*. Believer, thou hast a never-fading crown of righteousness and glory awaiting thee at thy departure hence — — — What a recompence is this of all thy labour!

* The full import of this act may perhaps be more clearly understood by expressing the very words and manner in which a sinner comes to Christ—“O my Lord and Saviour, behold I am vile, and justly deserve to be for ever spurned from thy footstool, &c. But thou hast died for sinners, even the chief, &c. I have no hope but in thee, &c. O receive a poor prodigal, &c. I look for redemption through thy blood; O let thy blood cleanse me from all sin, &c. And while I trust in thy name, enable me to depart from all iniquity, &c. Be thou my only Lord, and let every thought and desire of my heart be brought into captivity to thy holy will, &c.”

^b 1 Tim. iv. 8. ^c John x. 10. ^d Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 4.

What encouragement to come continually to Christ does such a prospect afford thee!]

One would suppose that, with such prospects, all should be pressing toward the Saviour with their whole hearts. Let us then proceed to inquire,

II. Whence it is that any fall short of these blessings?

The reason assigned in the text is the most just and most humiliating of any. There is no unwillingness in Christ to save us, but we are unwilling to go to him for salvation.

1. We are indifferent about life—

[We consider all pretensions to a new and *spiritual life* as enthusiasm, and therefore disdain to apply to Christ for it. As for *eternal life*, we do not wish to hear any thing about it. If the prospect of temporal advancement be held out to us, we can cheerfully and intensely bend our minds to the attainment of it; but if heaven and all its glory be offered us, we slight it utterly. We choose to talk of any subject rather than religion, and universally agree to banish that from our conversation. If at any time the thought of eternity be obtruded upon us, we turn from it with disgust; and are uneasy till some other topic be brought forward. Even in the house of God we hear of heavenly things as if they were fabulous and unworthy of our attention. We love our own ways, though they will end in death; and will not endure to be told of heaven, because we cannot reconcile our minds to the way that leads thither. To this effect is that declaration of Christ, "They that hate me, love death."]

2. We are averse to the way in which alone it is to be obtained—

[We will not *come to Christ* for life: this appears to be *too humiliating*. If we could obtain life by any works of our own, we would gladly do them; but we cannot bear to be so entirely indebted to another. We do not choose to acknowledge ourselves lost and undone. We hope to establish some righteousness of our own. Hence we neither do, nor will, come to Christ for life and salvation. Besides, this way to life is *too strict*: as we do not like to come with humility, and faith, so neither do we feel that love which will instigate us to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service. We think that less religion will suffice, and are determined to perish, rather than endure such drudgery. In every ungodly sinner are the

* Prov. viii. 34—36. It is Christ who speaks here, ver. 22—31.

words of our Saviour verified, "How often would I, but ye would not^f."]

INFER—

1. What ground for self-condemnation will there be in the day of judgment!

[Every condemned sinner, however full of excuses now, will then have his mouth shut; yea, even now a moment's reflection must convince us, that every sinner's condemnation is the effect of his own obstinacy. Who amongst you does not know, that he ought to read the word of God, and to seek his face, and to repent of sin, and to flee to Christ for refuge, and to give up himself to Christ in a way of holy obedience? Yet you will not do it. Your conscience at times remonstrates with you: yet you will not obey its voice: and your recollections of this in the eternal world will be one of the most bitter ingredients in the cup which you will drink to all eternity.]

2. What astonishing grace and mercy are there in the Lord Jesus Christ!

[His reproof contains in it a most gracious invitation. He addresses all of us at this instant, "Come unto me and I will give you life^g." Let none resist him any longer. Let us go to him, and he will in no wise cast us out^h.]

^f Matt. xxiii. 37.

^g Matt. xi. 28.

^h John vi. 37.

MDCXXXII.

MEN'S WANT OF LOVE TO GOD.

John v. 42. *I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.*

OUR blessed Lord "needed not that any should testify of man: for he himself knew perfectly what was in man^a;" and, consequently, without any reference to overt acts, could determine what was the state of every man's soul before God. Yet, in making known his decisions upon character, he, for the most part, appealed to fact; especially if his testimony was to their discredit. In declaring Nathanael to be "an Israelite indeed, and without guile," he referred to secret transactions, known only to God and to

^a John ii. 24, 25.

Nathanael himself: but, in denouncing those whom he was now addressing as destitute of the love of God, he appealed to their obstinacy in rejecting him, notwithstanding the full evidence he had given them of his Messiahship^b. It is probable that this testimony of his gave great offence: yet is there occasion for it to be given respecting multitudes in the present day; and, no doubt, if he were here present, he still would be constrained to say of many, "I know *you*, that the love of God is not in *you*."

In confirmation of this, I will shew,

I. That such characters do still exist—

[But where must we look for them? Can it be supposed that a single individual of this character is to be found in the midst of us? Go round to each individual in rotation, and ask each apart, "Have you the love of God in you?" Perhaps there is not one who would not reply, "Yes; I hope and trust I have." Some, I can have no doubt, would be quite indignant at the question; and would answer with disdain, "What! do you suppose I am a downright reprobate?" In this respect there would be but little difference between the different classes of the community. The *Moral* would deem their morality a decisive proof of the point; nor would the *Immoral* account their immoralities any proof to the contrary: they would find reasons enough for their deviations from the straight line of duty, without impeaching the integrity of their own hearts before God, and their attachment, on the whole, to him. The *Old* would conclude, of course, that they could not have attained to their age without having at least secured this first principle of all religion: and the *Young* would intimate, that, though they *make no profession* of religion, they are not so destitute of it as this question would imply. All would consider it as a libel upon the Christian Church to suppose that such a character should be found within its pale, unless perhaps amongst those, whose whole habits proclaim them to be addicted to every species of iniquity.

But it was to those who had been admitted into covenant with God by circumcision, and who were attending the ministry of our blessed Lord, that the words in my text were addressed: and therefore it is more than probable, that still, even amongst professing Christians, there are some who answer to this character; and of whom, one, who had a perfect knowledge of them, might say, "I know *you*, that the love of God is not in *you*."]

^b ver. 38, 40, 42.

But the existence of such characters will not be doubted by any of us, when once we have seen,

II. How they may be known and distinguished—

Doubtless such characters may be known, by themselves at least, if not by their fellow-creatures also. Our fellow-creatures, it is true, can judge only by outward acts, because they cannot discern the workings of the heart: but the point may be ascertained by ourselves at all events, if on examination we find,

1. An habitual want of those dispositions which are essential to love—

[Wherever love exists, there must be an esteem of, a desire after, and a delight in, the object beloved: and these feelings must bear some proportion to the worthiness of the object himself. Now, of course, if God be that object, he must exceed in our estimation all created good, as much as the meridian sun surpasses the faint radiance of the glow-worm. And, inasmuch as we can never be happy without him, we must thirst after him, even as the hunted deer thirsts after the water brooks; and find in the enjoyment of his presence every desire of our souls completely satisfied. Now, we can be at no loss to discover how far our experience accords with this. At all events, if we be utter strangers to all these exercises of mind, the matter is clear: a voice from heaven could not make it more clear than the testimony of our own conscience has already made it. What should we ourselves judge of the professions of a fellow-creature, who pretended to feel a suitable regard for us, whilst in no one of these respects did he ever manifest it in the smallest degree? The judgment, then, that we should pass on him, we must pass on ourselves; and conclude, for a certainty, that the total absence of all these dispositions towards God proves that the love of God is not in us.]

2. An habitual indulgence of those dispositions which are repugnant to love—

[It is not an *occasional* failure in our duty that will prove us destitute of love to God: for, then, where would so much as one lover of God be found? But if there be in us an habitual indulgence of feelings absolutely inconsistent with the love of God, then also will the point be clearly decided. For instance, God has said, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Again, it is said, "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth

up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him^d?" Again, it is said, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments^e." Now here are marks given us whereby we may know infallibly the state of our souls towards God. If the world and its poor vanities rival him in our hearts, the matter is clear. If we have so little regard for God, that we can shut up our bowels of compassion from our destitute fellow-creatures, instead of relieving them for his sake, then also the point is decided for us. And, lastly, if our love to God do not actuate us so far as to ensure a willing obedience to his every command, then also no doubt is left about the point at issue: we are in every one of these cases declared to be obnoxious to the charge contained in our text.

I say, again, an *occasional* defect will not warrant so distressing a conclusion; but if our failure be universal, habitual, and allowed, the inference from it is undeniable; and we are declared by God himself to be destitute of any true love to him.]

Let us, then, in reference to such unhappy characters, contemplate,

III. In what an awful condition they are—

No words can adequately describe the misery of such a state. The persons who are obnoxious to this charge, are in a state,

1. Of fearful delusion—

[However pointed out by God, they put far from them the accusation, and boldly deny the charge. They cannot conceive of themselves as persons so lost to all that is good, as to have no love of God whatever in their hearts. They will admit that they do not love him so ardently, or serve him so fully, as they ought: but they will not admit that they have *no* love to him. They substitute some good sentiments respecting God in the place of real love to him; and thus, deceiving themselves by their own vain imaginations, they neglect to humble themselves before God on account of their extreme wickedness. Truly, if there were but one such person in the midst of us, one who was buoying himself up with some fallacious conceits, whilst God said respecting him, 'There is a wretch that has no love to me;' who amongst us would not be ready to weep over him? and who would not labour to undeceive him, whilst yet a discovery of his error might be available for his welfare?]

2. Of just condemnation—

^d 1 John iii. 17.

^e 1 John v. 3.

[It is not possible but that such persons must be objects of God's wrathful indignation. In fact, they are the very image of Satan himself: for what can be said worse of Satan than this, or what can characterize him more justly than this, that he has no love to God? It is not necessary that a man should have committed murder or adultery, to deserve the wrath of God. If he has no love to the Supreme Good, to Him whose perfections are infinite, to Him who every moment maintains him in existence; if he have no love to Him who gave his only dear Son to die for him, and offers his Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify him, and would gladly confer on him all the blessings both of grace and glory; his desert of God's wrath is unquestionable. St. Paul says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha:" and there is not a creature in the universe that will not assent to the same denunciation, in reference to the wretch that loves not God.]

3. Of utter incapacity for happiness, even if he were actually admitted into heaven—

[Suppose a man, destitute of love to God, were admitted into heaven; what happiness could he find there? Amidst all the heavenly hosts, there would not be so much as one with whom he could hold communion, or have one single feeling in sympathy. As for God, the God whom he hates, he could not bear the sight of him. The sinner would know, that it was in vain for him to assume any appearances of love; for that his heart could not but be known to God, and consequently he must be an object of God's utter abhorrence. For the employments of heaven, it is obvious he could have no taste: and he would solicit a dismissal from the place, where every thing he saw and heard must, of necessity, generate in him the bitterest feelings of envy, malignity, and despair. To take his portion under rocks and mountains would be to him a deliverance from scenes to which he was utterly averse, and from vexations painful to him as hell itself.]

Now, then,

1. Let every one of us institute an inquiry into this matter—

[St. Paul exhorted the Hebrews of old to "examine themselves, whether they were in the faith:" so now I would say, "Examine yourselves," whether there be in you any love to God. Do not take it for granted, without examination; and be careful, also, not to try yourselves by an inadequate test. Take the tests that have been before proposed; and see what is the habitual state of your minds in relation to them. To what purpose will it be to say, you love God; when the entire

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course of your feelings and habits declares the contrary? You cannot deceive God; nor can you prevail on him to give in your favour a judgment contrary to truth. Bring the matter to a trial. Be not content to leave it in suspense. Indeed, if you can be content to leave it in doubt whether you love God or not, you can have no clearer proof that you are altogether destitute of his love: for the smallest sense of love to him that could exist in your soul, would make you uneasy, till you had placed the existence of it beyond a doubt.]

2. Let us not be satisfied till we can appeal to God, and say, "Thou knowest that I do love thee"—

[Thus St. Peter was enabled to reply, in answer to the question thrice put to him by our blessed Lord^f: and we also should be able to make a similar appeal to the heart-searching God respecting our love to him. And why should we not? Of defects, every one of us must be conscious; yea, of such defects, that, if God were to enter into judgment with us according to them, we must perish. But of our desires after God, and our supreme delight in him, and our determination of heart, through grace, to please him, we may be conscious; and this consciousness may well abide in us, as a source of most exalted joy. I pray God that this joy may be ever yours, my beloved brethren; and that when we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, God himself may bear testimony to us all, as having borne a distinguished place amongst his faithful, loving, and obedient servants.]

^f John xxi. 15—17.

MDCXXXIII.

FAITH INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE LOVE OF MAN'S APPLAUSE.

John v. 44. *How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*

IT is certain that great care is requisite in interpreting the Holy Scriptures; lest, on the one hand, we explain away their meaning altogether; or, on the other hand, we take occasion, from the strength of some particular expressions, to maintain doctrines which they do not fairly establish. And the more unqualified any declarations are, the greater caution we should use in affixing to them their true import. The passage before us is of the deepest importance

to every soul of man : but on the explanation of it, its force must entirely depend. Shall it be said, that *no kind of faith* will consist with our seeking honour from man, rather than from God ? or, that the mere “receiving” of honour from man is incompatible with true faith ? Either of these positions would be utterly false. Let us then proceed to the consideration of these words with that care which their importance demands ; and may God, of his infinite mercy, guide me, whilst I endeavour to shew,

I. What we are to understand by “believing” in Christ !

It can never surely be meant, that we cannot receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God, or have a general view of the leading doctrines contained in them, whilst we are seeking honour from man : for the mere weighing of evidences, and determining according to evidence, are acts of the mind, which every man of sense, whatever be his feelings as to human applause, is capable of performing. Certainly much more than a bare assent must be comprehended in the faith here spoken of. It must import two things :

1. An acceptance of Christ, as he is set forth in the Holy Scriptures—

[The Scriptures speak of our “receiving the Lord Jesus Christ^a.” We must receive him as the gift of God the Father to a sinful world ; and must receive him, too, for all the ends and purposes for which he is given. If we embrace him not under all the relations, and for all the ends for which he is sent, we reject him, rather than acknowledge him ; and put him away from us by unbelief, instead of receiving him into our hearts by faith. It is not optional with us to separate his offices, and to acknowledge him in those only which are agreeable to our own minds. Whatever “God has made him to us,” that he is to be with our full consent ; our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our complete redemption^b.”]

2. A surrender of ourselves to him, as his obedient followers—

[Without this we can never be acknowledged by him as his : “If any man will be my Disciple, let him deny himself,

^a John i. 12. Col. ii. 6.

^b 1 Cor. i. 30.

and take up his cross daily, and follow me." And so unreserved must our surrender of ourselves to him be, that, if we be not ready even to lay down our lives for him, we shall be regarded by him in no other light than as aliens or traitors. A faith which does not operate in this manner, and to this extent, is no better than "the faith of devils:" it is "dead," and will leave the soul dead to all eternity*.

Such, then, is the faith of God's elect; and such the faith of which our Lord speaks in the words before us; a faith that "works by love," and "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world."†

Having ascertained what is meant by faith, we proceed to shew,

II. Who they are who are declared incapable of exercising it—

[The mere "receiving" of honour from man has no such effect: for the good man passes "through honour as well as dishonour, and through good report as well as evil report." It is the *seeking* of honour from man that is here spoken of; that is, the seeking of it, either *independently* of "the honour that cometh from God," or *in preference to it*. All desire of man's approbation is not wrong: a child may properly seek the approbation of his parent; a servant, of his master; a subject, of his prince. But to make man's approbation the main object of our pursuit, is to put man in the place of God: and this can never be pleasing to the Supreme Being; who is "a jealous God," and "will not give his glory to another‡." Nor is it necessary that what we do should be substantially and in itself evil, in order to provoke God to jealousy: our actions may be good *in themselves*; and yet, if they be done to please man, their character is altogether changed, and they become hateful in the sight of God. Almsgiving and prayer are good; but if either the one or the other be done in order to obtain applause from man, it is vitiated, and debased, and execrable: and fasting itself is odious, when proceeding from no better principle than this*. It was this base desire of man's applause which chiefly characterized the Pharisees of old†: and, wherever it prevails, it destroys all pretensions to uprightness before God, and all hope of ever being acknowledged by Christ, as his Disciples: as St. Paul says, "If I yet pleased men, I could not be the servant of Jesus Christ‡."

In like manner we err, if we seek man's approbation, *in preference to* the honour that cometh of God. The two often

* Jam. ii. 19, 20, 26. † Isai. xlii. 8. • Matt. vi. 1—5, 16—18.

† Matt. xxiii. 5. § Gal. i. 10.

stand in competition with each other; or rather, I should say, are *always* opposed to each other, where the higher duties of Christianity are concerned: for, of "the circumcision of the heart, which is in the Spirit and not in the letter," we are told, "its praise is not of men, but of God^b." Indeed the praise of God is frequently not to be obtained without incurring the deepest odium from men. But, when that is the case, there must be no hesitation on our part whom to obey, and whose honour to seek. Our reply to the whole universe must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Neither parental authority, nor brotherly affection, must have any weight with us in opposition to God: for, if "we come to Christ, and *hate* not father and mother, and brother and sister, yea, and our own lives also," in comparison of him, "we cannot be his Disciples¹."

But in these two respects the persons described in our text are essentially defective. In respect of moral virtue, as it is called, they *may be* exemplary enough; and it is even taken for granted that they *are* so, by their "receiving of honour from men," which may be supposed to be accorded to them on account of their virtues: but, inasmuch as they do not utterly despise man's approbation in comparison of God's, and even "glory in shame" itself for the Lord's sake, they are incapable of exercising a true and saving faith in the Lord Jesus. I say again, It is *not the immoral* man, of whom our Lord speaks, but of *the man who*, from any cause whatever, *prefers the praise of man before the praise of God.*]

But *why* can they not exercise faith in Christ? Let us inquire,

III. Whence their incapacity arises—

The disposition to prefer the applause of man,

1. Unfits them for discerning truth—

[External evidences, as I have before observed, they may judge of: but the real excellency of the Gospel is hid from their eyes. The glory of Christ, and the beauty of holiness, they cannot appreciate; because they possess not that spiritual discernment whereby alone they can be seen^k. There is a film over their eyes: "their eye is evil; and therefore their body and soul are full of darkness¹." Sin and "Satan have altogether blinded them^m." The sublimer truths, when offered to their view, produce only the effect which a flood of light does when poured upon a disordered patient in a dark chamber. "They hate the light, and will not come to it:" and

^b Rom. ii. 29.

¹ Luke xiv. 26.

^k 1 Cor. ii. 14.

¹ Matt. vi. 22, 23.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 4.

ⁿ John iii. 19, 20.

when truth is set before them, they reply, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it?" Especially if they be called to renounce *self* altogether, and to glory in Christ alone, they have no ears to hear it: they are like those of whom our Lord said, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my words"."]

2. Indisposes them for walking according to the light they have—

[Much, doubtless, they may see: but they are kept in bondage by "the fear of man that bringeth a snare." As far as relates to a speculative view of the truth, they may have a strong conviction of it; so strong as, in the common acceptation of the term, to be said to possess faith. Thus we are told, respecting many who beheld our Lord's miracles: "Among the chief rulers, many believed on him: but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God^a." Here their incapacity to give themselves up to Christ is marked as proceeding from the very same cause to which it is ascribed in the text: "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Thus it is that this evil principle operates in ten thousand instances, keeping men from an attendance on public ordinances, from the society of the Lord's people, and from that public confession of Christ, whereby they ought to glorify his name.]

3. Leads them into courses directly contrary to the truth—

[A desire of worldly favours draws men, of necessity, not only to a neglect of what is good, but also to the positive commission of evil. The world will never be satisfied, till they bring us, in some measure at least, into a conformity with their views and habits. The compliances which they first desired are perhaps innocent: but gradually they increase their demands upon us, till they ensnare our feet, and defile our conscience, and lead us to dishonour our holy profession, if not altogether to renounce the faith.]

Now let me make this subject—

1. A matter of appeal—

[Our blessed Lord *appeals* to the persons themselves, whose spirit he reproves. And I also will venture to ask of you, my brethren, Whether you have not found in your converse with others, that a love of man's applause, wherever it has obtained, has proved a bar to the introduction of light into

^a John vi. 60.

^p John viii. 43.

^a John xii. 42, 43.

their souls; so that either you could produce no conviction upon their minds, or, if you have silenced their objections, you could not prevail upon them to act agreeably to the light they had received? I ask also, in reference to yourselves, Whether, if at any time you have suffered your minds to be influenced by that unworthy principle, it has not rendered your views of truth obscure, and your compliance with it difficult? I will yet further ask, Whether a carnal and a spiritual mind be not opposed to each other, as darkness to light; and whether the prevalence of one must not, in proportion as it prevails, dispel the other? Yes: it is an acknowledged and unquestionable truth, "that we cannot serve God and Mammon." If, then, the intimation in our text be confirmed by all that we see in others, and all that we experience in ourselves, let it be treasured up in our minds as a rule of action, and be referred to continually for the regulation of our hearts and lives.]

2. A ground of exhortation—

[Look not for the honour that cometh of man; for it is not to be obtained without sacrifices that are far too costly for so worthless an acquisition. Let your hearts be right with God. Let his revealed will be your sure directory: and regard nothing in opposition to it. Seek to please him at all events, though you should displease the whole world. I mean not by this, that you should not listen to good advice: for it is highly desirable that you should "walk wisely in a perfect way." But let that advice alone be followed, that is founded on the word of God. And be careful to keep a conscience void of offence: and so to walk before God, that you may be approved of him, and receive from him at last that testimony of his approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."]

MDCXXXIV.

UNBELIEF REBUKED.

John v. 45, 46. *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.*

THERE is nothing more painful to a pious Minister, than to reflect, that, instead of having to present all his hearers to God as his children, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me," he will have to stand at the bar of judgment as an accuser of

by far the greater part of them, and to appear as a swift witness against them. To the majority of them, the most successful minister must say, with our blessed Lord, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." But, whether they be called as accusers or not, the inspired writers will undoubtedly execute that painful office; as our Lord here testifies to his unbelieving audience: "Think not that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuses you, even Moses, in whom ye trust: for had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me."

Let me now, in faithfulness to your souls,

I. Set before you the charge which the whole inspired volume brings against us—

Strong was that charge which Moses exhibited against the Jews—

[Much "had he written respecting Christ." The whole ceremonial law was one typical adumbration of him — — — the moral law itself, as denouncing a curse against every one that should transgress it in the slightest instance, was, in fact, intended to shew men their need of Christ, and to shut them up to that way of salvation which he should open for them*. The prophecies which he revealed were many and clear: he set forth Christ as "the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head;" and as "the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the world should be blessed;" and above all, as "that prophet who should in due time be raised up like unto himself; to whom all must take heed, at the peril of their souls."

Now to these writings our blessed Lord appealed continually, in confirmation of his divine mission. But the Jews, whilst they pretended the highest veneration for Moses, actually made their regard for him their plea for rejecting Christ. But this shewed that they did not understand the writings of Moses, and that they did not, in fact, believe any one of those things which he had spoken: for if they had understood him, and believed his testimony, they would of necessity have believed in Christ, of whom he testified. We may suppose him, then, as accusing these people before God the Father to this effect: "Thou seest, O God, what a zeal they profess for me: but it

* Rom. iii. 21, 22. and Gal. iii. 22—24.

is all hypocrisy; for, instead of receiving my testimony respecting their Messiah, they shut their eyes and ears against every word that I have spoken; and make no other use of my testimony, but to pervert it, and to found upon it their rejection of that very Saviour whom I have revealed."]

But stronger far is that charge which the whole inspired volume brings against us—

[We profess to believe in the written word, both of the Old and New Testament: and if any one were to brand us with the name of infidels and deists, we should be filled with indignation against him, as uttering a gross calumny. But how do we manifest our faith? The Scriptures tell us, that "except we repent, we must perish." But who believes it? Who is stirred up, by that declaration, to real penitence and contrition? The Scriptures tell us, that we must look to Christ for salvation, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent. But where do we find that intense earnestness to obtain relief, and that utter renunciation of every other hope but that revealed to us in the cross of Christ? The Scriptures require us to live by Christ, exactly as the Israelites lived by the manna which they gathered, and the waters of the rock that followed them. But where do we find persons making this continual use of Christ, if I may so speak; and living altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them? The Scriptures tell us, that "having been bought with a price, we must glorify Christ with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." But where do we find persons employing every member of their body, and every faculty of their soul, for the glory of Christ?

Behold, then, what an accusation the whole inspired volume brings against us. 'See, Lord, this people! Thou knowest how fully thy holy will is revealed in every page of thy word: yet who regards it? Who regards any word contained in this volume, provided he has any interest to serve, or any lust to gratify, by the violation of it? I accuse the whole Christian world, with the exception of a very few, as hypocrites: for, with all their professed regard for thy revealed will, they violate it in all its most essential points; and with their boast of being Christians, they live altogether as if they were downright heathens.']

Now then, having stated the charge, I will proceed to,

II. Put you upon your trial in relation to it—

Of the little flock who believe in Christ, I will say nothing. I will confine myself to the great mass of

my hearers, who have never yet been renewed by the grace of God. And I ask,

1. Is not the charge true of you ?

[Look, I pray you, and examine the matters before proposed. See in what state you are, as it respects repentance for sin, and faith in Christ, and holy obedience to the commands of God. Compare yourselves with the Scriptures which ye profess to believe: see whether you are “cast into them, as into a mould;” and whether ye are really living as the Apostles did? I will not ask whether you have attained the eminence of Paul; for to that none of us can pretend: but are we followers of him, as he was of Christ? And if he were to see the daily habit of our minds, would he acknowledge us as imbued with the same spirit with him, and as treading in the same steps? — — — It is evident, then, that we are guilty before God; and that the accusations which Moses, and the Prophets, and the Apostles, are exhibiting against us, are true^b.]

2. Are ye not then deeply criminal ?

[We are in the habit of reprobating infidels as amongst the vilest of men. And far am I from intending, in any respect, to lessen the abhorrence with which they are viewed, and should be viewed. But it may well be doubted, whether the great mass of Christians be not in a worse state than they. For infidels, however profane, are at least consistent: they do not profess to believe the Scriptures: they regard them all, and every thing contained in them, as “a cunningly-devised fable.” But the Christian world profess to receive the Bible as the word of God, and to expect that men shall be dealt with in judgment according to the plan proposed in it: yet do they in their lives give the lie to all that they profess. If they really believed in that word, they would believe in Christ, and love him, and serve him, and glorify him. Could a man believe that his house was on fire, and ready to fall upon him, and not flee out of it? It is a delusion altogether: and in pretending to believe at all, they only lie unto the Holy Ghost.]

3. Are ye not utterly inexcusable ?

[What excuse can you offer in vindication of yourselves? Is not every part of the inspired volume brought before you in its season? Ye know that “we have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you,” but “have declared unto you the whole counsel of God.” But, at all events, the inspired volume has been in your hands, and ye might have drunk water at the fountain-head. It has been accessible to you at all times: and

^b See John xii. 48. where all this is plainly asserted.

if it have been "a fountain sealed," whose fault is that? Has not God promised, by his Holy Spirit to open it? and has not Christ told you, that "if you would ask of him, he would give you living waters, which should be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life?" What is there that has been wanting to you? Has there been any defect of evidence? No: the evidence has shone forth as bright as the sun. Has there been any want of encouragement? No: there is not any species of encouragement that has not been poured upon you as a flood. Nothing has been wanting, but a humble and docile spirit. It is your own pride, and worldliness, and unbelief, that has kept from you the blessings of salvation: and you have none but yourselves to blame.]

APPLICATION—

[I say, then, confess your hypocrisy, and humble yourselves for it——— And take the Holy Scriptures, and "search them with all diligence; and pray to the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth." But mark more especially what they speak of *Christ*; for "of Him they testify in every part:" and, having found him, believe in him, and surrender up yourselves to him: and let your whole life attest the consistency of your character, and the integrity of your hearts before God.]

• ver. 39.

MDCXXXV.

CHRIST'S MESSIAHSHIP PROVED.

John vi. 14. *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*

THE friends of infidelity wish it to be thought, that the Gospel which they reject is not supported by such a weight of evidence as would justify them in yielding to it an implicit and unqualified obedience. But they have, unperceived by themselves, a bias against the truth; and will suffer any slight difficulty, which they are not able to solve, to outweigh all the most decisive proofs that can be adduced in its support. Where the mind is candid, and open to conviction, it will be satisfied with that measure of evidence which the subject itself fairly admits of, without demanding such as it is unreasonable to expect. The persons of whom my text speaks, afford

us a good example in this respect. They had seen a stupendous miracle wrought before them, even the feeding of five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves, and two small fishes: and they were convinced that no person could work such a miracle as this, unless God were with him; and therefore, without further hesitation, they said, We are expecting the Messiah; and this must be he: "Of a truth, this is that Prophet who should come into the world."

From this acknowledgment I will take occasion to consider,

I. The proofs which Christ gave of his Messiahship—

Miracles may properly be regarded as proofs of a divine mission—

[I am not prepared to say that a miracle is of itself, independent of all its circumstances, a sufficient proof that the person performing it comes from God. For there may be circumstances so peculiar, as to account for God's permission of such an event, even whilst the persons through whose instrumentality it occurs, are no better than hypocrites and impostors. The magicians of Pharaoh were permitted to imitate some of the miracles of Moses, for the very purpose of demonstrating the more forcibly, that Moses alone was invested with any authority from him. They were permitted to turn their rods into serpents: but Moses' rod swallowed up all of theirs. They were permitted to inflict several plagues; but they could not remove one. Moses alone was empowered to do that. Nor could they follow Moses beyond a certain extent, or even avert from themselves the plagues that Moses inflicted: so that they themselves were made witnesses for Jehovah, and were constrained to say, "This is the finger of God."

Again: God having done so many and great wonders for his people, may see fit to try their faith and love, in order that the faithful amongst his people may display their fidelity, and the hypocritical their hypocrisy. And for this end we may conceive him to suffer some impostor to assume the character of a prophet, and, by the performance of some sign or wonder, and the prediction of some event that shall come to pass, to *give occasion* for his people to manifest what is in their hearts. Indeed, he warned his people that he would suffer such occurrences, *in order* to try their fidelity to him*.

But we cannot conceive that he should suffer such a trial to

* Deut. xiii. 1—3.

proceed so far as to impose on those who were truly upright. We can have no doubt, but that to a humble and prayerful soul there would appear, at the same time, very abundant evidences of the imposture: for otherwise the true prophets would be unable to prove the divine authority of their mission.

Admitting, however, that such occurrences may, for wise and gracious purposes, be permitted, we still must regard miracles, when wrought expressly in confirmation of the divine authority, as sufficient attestations to the mission of him who works them. These were the credentials whereby Moses was to authenticate his mission to the Israelites in Egypt^b. By this test the worshippers of Baal agreed to have the contest decided between Elijah and them: "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God:" and, on seeing the testimony borne from heaven to Elijah, they exclaimed, "The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!" To this test he referred the disciples of John, who were sent to inquire whether he were the Christ^c — — — And to the same he continually referred, as beyond all possibility of contradiction decisive of his own mission^d — — —]

And, beyond all doubt, the miracles which Jesus wrought were sufficient for this end—

[They were altogether innumerable; insomuch that the inspired historian says of them, that "if they should be written every one of them (with all their attendant circumstances), the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." But we need not go further than the miracle before us. The Disciples, so far from being confederate with their Master to impose upon the multitude, acknowledged, with the utmost simplicity, the impossibility of providing for such a multitude in that wilderness. Our Lord had made the inquiry of them for the express purpose of calling their attention, and the attention of all around them, the more fully, to the miracle which he was about to work. The five thousand men were all placed in ranks, a hundred in length and fifty in breadth, that every thing might be done in their sight, and without a possibility of collusion. The food having been blessed by our Lord, was committed to the Apostles for distribution; and, as fast as they disposed of it, the remainder was augmented in their hands, and all were supplied to the full: and after all had eaten and been satisfied, the fragments which were taken up far exceeded in quantity the original measure which they possessed. All the people were themselves witnesses of what passed before their own eyes: and if there had been any

^b Exod. iv. 1—9.

^c Matt. xi. 3—6.

^d John iii. 36. and x. 24, 25, 37, 38. and xiv. 10, 11.

deception, it could not but have been discovered. This miracle, therefore, gave them a very just ground for the conclusion which they instantly formed; namely, that Jesus must be the Messiah, who had been predicted, and was at that time expected to make his appearance in the world.]

Concluding Jesus, then, to be the true Messiah, let us consider,

II. Our duty to him under that character—

The history before us will enable us to state this to advantage. Our duty to him is,

1. To believe in him—

[At the time that Jesus abode on earth, it was generally expected that the Prophet spoken of by Moses would appear; "the Prophet like unto Moses," who should be a Lawgiver, a Mediator, a Prophet, a Ruler, a Deliverer*. Such a prophet Jesus professed to be†: and such a prophet he was. The people who saw this miracle had no doubt of it: they said, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." Let the same conviction be on your minds. View him as the true Messiah. Regard him in the full extent of his character, *as resembling Moses* — — — and give him, from your inmost souls, the honour due unto his name — — —]

2. To become his devoted followers—

[Hear from him all that he has come to reveal: for God has said, that "Whoso will not hear that Prophet, *he will require it of him.*" How zealous the people were in his cause, you are told in the very words following my text: "They sought to take him by force, and to make him their King." In this they erred, because they thought of him only as a *temporal* Prince. And therefore he withdrew, and hid himself from them. But if you will, in a *spiritual* view, make him your King, I will venture to assure you, he will not withdraw from you, or decline the honour you would assign him. You may even come by *force*, the holy "violence" of faith and prayer with which "the kingdom of God is taken;" and he will yield to your importunity, and establish his throne in your hearts. O that we could see somewhat of this ardour in the minds of those who profess to acknowledge him as their Messiah! Let every rival be banished from your hearts — — — and let Jesus henceforth reign the unrestrained governor of your souls.]

3. To look to him for all that your utmost necessities can require—

* Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19.

† Acts iii. 22, 23.

[Though he had withdrawn from them, they concluded that he would follow his Disciples; and therefore they followed him, though with much difficulty, and to a great distance, in the confidence that he would supply their every want. Herein also they erred, because they sought only "the meat which perisheth:" but if you will seek of him the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, he assures you, that he will give it to the utmost extent of your necessities; for that "God the Father has sealed" him to this very office^s. You see how he supplied thousands of persons with food: and can he not equally supply your wants, though they should be ever so numerous? He can; he will. He has all fulness treasured up in him for that very end. "He is ascended up above all heavens, *that he may fill all things*"^h. Indeed, by the ministry of his word, he is working this miracle yet daily. How many does he nourish and strengthen by the bread of life that we dispense! Know, then, that he will not commit this ministration to us in vain, as it respects you: for God has said, He will "supply all your need out of his riches in glory by Christ Jesus!"ⁱ]

^s ver. 27.

^h Eph. iv. 10.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 19.

MDCXXXVI.

LABOURING FOR HEAVEN.

John vi. 27. *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

OUR blessed Lord never failed to improve any occasion that was afforded him of doing good to the souls of men. His labours collected people from every quarter; and sometimes they must actually have fainted by the way, if he had not interposed by miracle to supply their necessities. But these very exertions of his, in administering to their temporal wants, were made an occasion of fostering in many their favourite sentiment, that he was come to accomplish for them a temporal deliverance. He had just "fed five thousand men with five loaves and two small fishes:" and we are told that, in order to prevent their "taking him by force to make him a

king, he departed into a mountain himself alone^a." His Disciples he sent over the sea, towards Capernaum: and multitudes, though they saw he was not with them, concluding that, by some means or other, he would follow them, went thither to meet him: and when they had found him, they expressed their surprise, and asked him, how he had contrived to come thither? Our Lord, instead of gratifying their foolish curiosity, turned their attention to the state of their own souls, and pointed out to them the mistake under which they laboured: they supposed that they were evincing a zeal for his glory; whereas they were not actuated by any conviction that he was the true Messiah, but by a blind hope that he would prove himself such a Messiah as they vainly expected: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles," (and were convinced by them of my Messiahship), but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled;" and conclude from thence, that I both can and will effect for you all which your carnal ambition can desire^b. Then he gives them the solemn admonition which I have just read to you: in unfolding which, I shall notice,

I. The direction here given—

We are not to understand the direction as containing a prohibition to attend to the concerns of the body, but only as intimating that they were not to be placed in competition with the concerns of the soul. It is in this way that we are to understand those memorable words, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." God does not mean to prohibit sacrifices, which he had positively enjoined: but only to express, that if an act of mercy could not be performed without entrenching upon a ceremonial command, the latter should give way to the former; since that which was of a moral nature was of greater worth, in his sight, than any thing which was merely ceremonial.

To attend to temporal concerns is a positive duty—

^a ver. 14, 15.

^b ver. 25, 26.

^c Matt. xii. 7.

[It is a duty we owe to *ourselves*: we are, by the very necessities of our nature, constrained to "obtain our bread by the sweat of our brow^a." We owe it to *our families*: for "if a man provide not for his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel^o. We owe it to the *poor*: for if we have enough for ourselves, yet are we enjoined to work with our hands the thing that is good, that we may have to give to him that needeth^c." We owe it to the *Church*. No man is to be supported in idleness: "for God has ordained, that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat^e." We owe it to *our God*: we are to be "not slothful in business, at the time that we are fervent in spirit, serving the Lord^h." In truth, "whatever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our mightⁱ."

It is of great importance that this matter should be well understood. Religion does not supersede our civil or social duties: it regulates them, and suggests the proper motives by which we are to be actuated in the performance of them: but it does not dispense with any: it subordinates them, indeed, to the duties which we owe immediately to God; but it inculcates and enjoins them, as necessary in their place, and as truly acceptable to God himself. We must "render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's."]

But an attention to spiritual concerns is of greater and more indispensable importance—

[The labour which pertains to them is incomparably more worthy of an intelligent and immortal being, than that which relates to the things of this life. I would not undervalue the occupations of the student in the pursuit of science, or of the artisan in the execution of his work, or of the peasant in the labours of the field. All are good in their place; but all may be performed by a heathen, no less than by a child of God. But the exercises of humiliation before God, of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, of an entire consecration of our souls to the service of the Deity; in a word, fellowship with God, and with his Son Jesus Christ, is a work in which an angel may engage, and in the performance of which the highest archangel would be honoured — — — The fruit also of spiritual labour infinitely excels all that can be reaped in the field of nature. The statesman, the philosopher, the merchant, the mechanic, have doubtless a rich reward of their labours: but it is a reward which an atheist may enjoy; and which, to whatever extent it is enjoyed, "perishes with the using:" it is all but

^a Gen. iii. 19.^o 1 Tim. v. 8.^c Eph. iv. 28.^e 2 Thess. iii. 10, 12.^h Rom. xii. 11.ⁱ Eccl. ix. 10.

as "the meat that perisheth." But the peace of God which passeth all understanding, the light of his reconciled countenance, a sense of his love shed abroad in the heart, the joy of the Holy Ghost, the earnest and foretastes of the heavenly bliss; what shall I say of these? what are earthly things in comparison of these? what, but a taper before the meridian sun? Besides, *these* endure for ever: they are "a meat that endureth unto eternal life;" and, to whatever extent they are enjoyed, they are but as the dawn of future blessedness, the first-fruits of an abundant harvest — — —

Can any labour be too great for *these*? The mind may easily be too intensely fixed on the vanities of time and sense, and the exertions made for them be too great: but it is not possible to have the desire after spiritual blessings too ardent, or the pursuit of them too laborious.]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The encouragement here afforded—

We may labour for the meat which perisheth, and be disappointed; as thousands are, who, after years of incessant toil, have either acquired little, or perhaps been reduced to the lowest ebb of want and misery. But this shall never be experienced by those who labour for that better meat which endureth unto everlasting life. For, as a recompence of their labours,

1. The Lord Jesus Christ will give it to them—

[The Lord Jesus constantly calls himself "the Son of Man;" because by that name, in particular, the Messiah was expected, and had been foretold^k. "Him had God the Father sealed," and attested, by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, and by an audible voice from heaven^l. By all his miracles, too, did God bear ample testimony to his Messiahship^m, and, above all, in his resurrection from the dead, and his visible ascension to the highest heavens. There is he invested with "all power both in heaven and earth;" and from thence will he communicate to all his believing people, according to the full extent of their necessities. The Lord Jesus Christ is of himself well disposed to give us all that we can desire: but, if it were possible to have any security beyond that which we possess in his own love and mercy, we have it in his ordination to that very office by the Father, and in his exaltation to heaven for that very end, "that he may be Head over all things to his Church," and "that he may fill all things" "out of the fulness that is treasured up in him".]

^k Dan. vii. 13.

^l Matt. iii. 16, 17.

^m John v. 36.

ⁿ Eph. i. 22, 23.

2. He will give it to them all, without exception—

[There is no want of power in him to give it to whomsoever he will. Nor will he be constrained to work a miracle to supply any number that call upon him. "In his Father's house there is bread enough, and to spare." Nor will he shew any partiality to one above another. Every labourer, whether old or young, rich or poor, shall receive his proper recompence, every one in exact proportion to his own labour^o. There will not be with him a different standard whereby to estimate the labours of men; the time and zeal of one being regarded as nothing, in comparison with the exertions of others. "He will judge righteous judgment." It may be that some do not begin to labour till they are incapable, according to human apprehension, of doing any thing to good effect: but though they "come into the vineyard at the eleventh hour," they shall have a portion dealt out to them with a liberal hand. One thing only must be observed by all: whatever they receive, they must receive it as a *gift*, "a reward, not of debt, but of grace^p." This is indispensably necessary for them all. Not one is to look upon the meat as *earned* by him; because there is no proportion whatever between the work and the reward, so far as *merit* is concerned. The labour of ten thousand years would not merit the smallest portion in heaven: the best of men are but "unprofitable servants:" but, if men will labour, "they shall never labour in vain, or run in vain^q."]]

This subject affords just OCCASION for,

1. Reproof to the indolent—

[Truly, when we see how anxiously and industriously men exert themselves for the things of time and sense, the very best amongst us may well be ashamed and confounded on account of his own listlessness and inactivity in the ways of God. Look at the worldling: see him "rising early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness," for weeks, and months, and years: see the satisfaction which he feels in prospects of success, and his pain in the apprehensions of failure: see how alive he is to every thing which may help him forward in his favourite pursuit, and how every thing is made to bear upon that. When shall *we* engage with such ardour as that in the pursuit of heaven? When shall we use the means of grace with the same zest and constancy as they do the means of temporal advancement? When will every thing be swallowed up, as it were, in the concerns of the soul? Alas! it must be confessed that we fall exceeding short in all these exertions, and that "the men of this world are in their

^o 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^p Rom. iv. 4.

^q 1 Cor. xv. 58.

generation wiser than the children of light." For one Mary that sits habitually at the Saviour's feet, there are many Marthas, who, in spite of their professed love for Christ, are careful and cumbered about many things.

But, if this be the case with the most spiritual amongst us; what shall I say to those who have never yet set themselves in earnest to obtain eternal life? The consciences of many must surely testify against them, that, instead of labouring with all their might for spiritual and eternal blessings, they have never spent so much as one hour in prayer for the salvation of their souls. They are content to leave their eternal interests to chance, if I may so speak; though, if God be true, they leave them to certain ruin. The Lord Jesus Christ, as we have seen, will give to them that *labour*: but where is it said, that he will give to them that *labour not*? No such promise can be found in all the book of God. No, indeed: all is suspended on the use of means: "Ask, and ye shall have: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He who improves his talents, whether they be more or less, shall be rewarded: but "the unprofitable servant, that hides his talent in a napkin, shall assuredly be cast into outer darkness." Consider this, my dearly beloved, and begin without delay the work that is assigned you; for "the day is fast passing away; and the night is quickly coming, when no man can work."]

2. For congratulation to the poor—

[It must be confessed, that, in relation to temporal concerns, your portion is far inferior to that of the more opulent. For you may often be willing to labour, and not be able to find employment: and when you do labour ever so hard, you may be scarcely able to earn sufficient to supply your necessities. But, in relation to spiritual and everlasting happiness, the balance is altogether as much in your favour. The richer part of the community are so engrossed with the cares or pleasures of this life, that they can scarcely find a moment to devote to the concerns of eternity. The very dispositions which are generated by carnal ease, render it "more difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle." Hence you read, that "not many mighty, not many noble, are called." But what do you read concerning the poor? Hear, and be astonished! hear, and bless your God! "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom?" Yes, he has: and experience proves it: and the appeal which God himself makes to us respecting it is

† 1 Cor. i. 26.

‡ Jam. ii. 5.

absolutely unanswerable. Be of good cheer then; and bless your God for the privileges which you enjoy. True, indeed, no rich man shall perish *because* he is rich; nor shall any poor man be saved *because* he is poor: but if the rich neglect their Saviour and their God, however full their tables may now be, they shall soon "want a drop of water to cool their tongues:" but the poor, though they be so destitute that they have not rags to cover their sores from the dogs that molest them, shall, if they truly seek after God, soon sit down with Abraham at the heavenly banquet, and rejoice in all the abundance of God's glory for ever and ever[†]. Let not your poverty, then, be urged as an excuse for neglecting God; but be improved rather, as an incentive to secure the true riches, which shall never fade away.]

[†] Luke xvi. 19—25.

MDCXXXVII.

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

John vi. 28, 29. *Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*

THE real scope of these words is more clearly seen in the original than in the translation. Our blessed Lord, knowing that many had followed him from carnal motives, and under an expectation that He who had fed thousands of persons with a few loaves and fishes would establish a temporal kingdom amongst them, had given them this solemn caution: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." These words they had not fully understood. They supposed that some great advantages were to be derived from him; and that some particular works were to be done, in order to obtain them: but what works they were, they did not know. They asked therefore of our Lord, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? thou speakest of some works appointed to be

done by us; and we want to know what they are, in order that we may commence the performance of them." It must here be observed, that they use, throughout their reply, the very same word as Jesus had used when he bade them "*labour*." Our blessed Lord, still using the same word, says, "*This* is the work of God," (that is, this is the thing which God enjoins you to do, in order to a participation of the blessings which I am come to bestow), that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent."

In opening these words, I will shew,

- I. What is that work which God more particularly requires of us—

It is, that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

Let us, however, distinctly notice what kind of a work this is—

[It is *not a mere assent* to the truth of his Messiahship, but *an humble affiance* in him as the Saviour of the world. We must feel our need of him — — — We must see the suitability and sufficiency of his salvation — — — We must actually go to him as the appointed Saviour, and seek acceptance with God through Him alone — — — We must renounce every other hope — — — and make him "all our salvation and all our desire" — — —]

And let us bear in mind, that this is "the work of God"—

[It is *a work*. True, indeed, it is often in the Scriptures opposed to works; as when it is said, "A man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ"^b: still, however, it is a work, and a great work too, and such a work as none but God himself can enable us to perform. Only bear in mind the foregoing description of it, and you will see, that, in order to the exercise of it, there must be the deepest prostration of soul before God, and a going-forth of the whole soul to him in a way of humble and grateful affiance. And who is sufficient for the performance of it? Verily, "it is the gift of God," and of God only^c: it is his grace, and his grace alone, that can ever form it in the soul^d. It is *his* work also, not merely because he alone can work it in us, but because it is that which he requires of every living man. When

^a ver. 27. ἐργάζεσθε.

^c Eph. ii. 8.

^b Gal. ii. 16.

^d Acts xviii. 27. Phil. i. 29.

he commanded his Gospel to be preached to the whole world, this was the declaration which was to be universally and invariably made; "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned."]

To justify what is here said of faith, I proceed to shew,

II. Why it has this great pre-eminence above all other works—

In some respects, faith is inferior to other graces: as the Apostle says, "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity*." There are, however, some points of view in which faith rises above every other grace, and may, in a pre-eminent degree, be called, "The work of God."

1. It is that for which Christ himself "was sent" into the world—

[He was sent, no doubt, to redeem the world by his own most precious blood. He was sent "to die for us—He, the just, for us the unjust, that he might bring us to God." But, in executing this office, he was to become the one object of faith and hope to the whole world. He was lifted up upon the cross, precisely in the way that the brazen serpent was erected on the pole in the wilderness. The serpent was to convey healing to those only who looked to it as God's appointed instrument for that end: and the Lord Jesus must in like manner be looked to, in order to a participation of his benefits; as he says by the prophet, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth†." This our blessed Lord pointed out, with very extraordinary fulness, in his discourse with Nicodemus. He repeated it again, and again, and again: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life. He that *believeth on him* is not condemned: but he that *believeth not* is condemned already, because he hath *not believed* in the name of the only-begotten Son of God He that *believeth on the Son* hath life: and he that *believeth not the Son* shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him‡." If we believe not on him, we defeat, as far as respects

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3. † Isai. xlv. 22. ‡ John iii. 14—18, 36.

ourselves, all the gracious purposes of God the Father, who hath sent him; and all that Christ himself has done, in dying for us; and all that the Holy Spirit has done, in bearing testimony to him, and in revealing him to the world. There is no other grace, the want of which does such dishonour to God, as this: for it sets aside all the wonders of his love, and pours contempt on all the riches of his grace. The whole mystery of godliness is made void, unless he who was "God manifest in the flesh" is also "believed on in the world^b."

2. It is that, without which all other graces will be of no avail—

[I will suppose a person to possess as many graces as St. Paul himself: of what use will they be to the salvation of his soul, if he believe not in the Lord Jesus Christ? If, indeed, we had never sinned at all, and were to continue sinless to our dying hour, we might hope for acceptance with God without the intervention of Christ. But, as we are sinners before God, how can we ever obtain forgiveness with him, except through the atonement which has been offered for us? But, if we obey perfectly, we do no more than our duty: there can be no overplus to merit the forgiveness of past sin. And, if God were freely to forgive the past, what could we do to purchase heaven? What act have we ever done which we could presume to carry to Almighty God, saying, 'This needs no forgiveness at thy hands; on the contrary, it is so perfect and meritorious, that I can claim all the glory of heaven as a just recompence for it?' Verily, if Job himself, the most perfect man upon earth, dared not urge such a plea in his own behalfⁱ, much less can we: and therefore we must renounce every such self-righteous thought, and, with the Apostle Paul, "desire to be found in Christ; not having our own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ^k." Let me not be misunderstood, as though I would undervalue graces of any kind: they are all good and necessary in their place: but no one of them, nor all together, can justify the soul before God: that can be effected only by faith, which unites us unto Christ, and interests us in all that Christ has done and suffered for us.]

3. It is that which will secure, for every one that possesses it, all the blessings both of grace and glory—

[It is impossible for one who believes in Christ to perish. Whatever he may have been, whatever he may have done, even though he may have been as wicked as Manasseh himself, we are warranted in affirming, that, through faith in the Lord

^b 1 Tim. iii. 16.

ⁱ Job ix. 20.

^k Phil. iii. 9.

Jesus Christ, he may find acceptance with God: "though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be made white as snow." Our blessed Lord has expressly declared this, without any limitation or exception: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Nor is there any limit to the benefits which the believing penitent shall obtain at his hands. Does he desire pardon? The declaration of an inspired Apostle is, "All that believe, shall be justified from all things." Does his troubled soul sigh for peace? "Being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, so as to rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Does he pant after holiness? Such shall be the transforming efficacy of his faith, that "his very heart shall be purified by it;" and in the exercise of it he shall "be changed into the Saviour's image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Now there is no other grace, of which these things can be spoken; because there is no other grace that can unite us to Christ, or derive from him those rich communications which alone can produce these great effects.]

APPLICATION—

1. Is there, then, an *inquirer* here?

[I suppose there are some who are ready to ask, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Let me, before I reply to this, ask in return, 'Are you *sincere* in making this inquiry? And will you, if I set before you the very truth of God, endeavour earnestly to comply with it? Can you, from your hearts, declare before God what Jeremiah's hearers engaged to him, "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for which the Lord thy God shall send thee unto us: whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God¹.'" If this be really the disposition of your minds, then do I confidently return to you the answer which St. Paul gave to the jailor's inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is the work which must be done by all: and this work really and truly done, you shall as surely find acceptance with God, as if you were already in heaven. I do not say, that, when you have done this, there remains nothing more to be done: but I say, that if this be really done, all the rest will follow. Once find the sweetness of that truth, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," and you will soon attain the character inse-

¹ Jer. xlii. 3—6.

parable from it: "You will walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."]

2. But methinks I hear the voice of an *objector*—

[Some one, perhaps, is saying, 'A fine easy way to heaven indeed! Only believe; and you may live as you will, and be sure of heaven at the last!'] But this objection will never be urged by one who knows what faith really is. Were it a mere assent to any set of truths, we might well be alarmed at the virtue assigned to it. But it is a grace, which contains in it the seed of all other graces. We speak of a living, not a dead faith: and a living faith will as surely be productive of holiness, both of heart and life, as the light of the sun will dispel the shadows of the night.

But the objector will say, that our whole statement is contrary to the Holy Scriptures; since our blessed Lord, in answer to one who had asked him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" replied, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The same answer will I give, if, like that inquirer, you are determined to save yourselves by your doings. But then, remember, you must keep them *all*, and *perfectly* too, and *from the first to the latest moment of your existence*. But if, in one instance, even though it be in thought only, you fail, the law will curse you to all eternity; as it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." And if you will not rest your hopes on such an obedience as this, then is there no other refuge for you but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor any other hope of acceptance for you than through faith in him. But if you still wish to adhere to the commandments, know that "this is God's commandment, that ye believe in his Son Jesus Christ^m;" and that there is no commandment in the Decalogue more peremptorily given than this; since it is expressly declared, that "if you obey it, you shall be saved: and if you obey it not, you shall be damned."]

3. Let me not close the subject without a few words to one, as an *approver*—

[It is truly delightful to think, that, however hostile the heart of man is to this doctrine, there are some who cordially approve it. Beloved brother, whoever thou art, who embracest it from thy heart, I congratulate thee from my inmost soul. For, in relation to all other works, a self-righteous man can never tell whether he has a sufficiency of them to justify him before God. To his latest hour he must be in fearful

^m 1 John iii. 23.

suspense about the state of his soul : but thou hast in thine own bosom a ground of the fullest assurance. The work of faith is such as will at once commend itself to thy conscience as really done. Thou wilt feel a consciousness that thou renoucest every other hope, and reliest on Christ alone. And in Christ there is such a sufficiency of all that thou needest, that thou canst not possibly entertain a doubt, whether he be able to save thee to the uttermost. Go on, then, "strong in faith, and giving glory to God." And, as the world will look for the fruits of thy faith, yea, and as God himself also will judge by them, see that thou shew thy faith by thy works, and that thou "abound in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God."]

MDCXXXVIII.

THE LIVING BREAD.

John vi. 34. *Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.*

A FANCIED approbation of the Gospel will consist with rooted enmity against it. But such an approbation always arises from carnal, or partial views of the truth. Many love God under the idea "that He is such an one as themselves." Thus the Samaritan woman desired the living water, that she might have no more occasion to go to the well^a. Thus also the people, whom our Lord was now addressing, seem to have misapprehended our Saviour's meaning. They had desired him to confirm his Divine mission by some miracle equal to what Moses had wrought for their forefathers in the wilderness^b. Our Lord assured them that He himself was the true bread, of which the manna was only a type and figure. They, little knowing what they asked for, desired him to give them the bread of which he spake. The petition however, in itself, was good. That you may be led to offer it in a more intelligent manner, we shall set before you,

I. The excellence of that bread—

^a John iv. 15.^b ver. 31.

Our Lord enters very minutely into this subject. He institutes a comparison between the manna, and himself as the bread of life; and shews the superiority of the true bread,

1. In its origin—

[They supposed that the manna had been given them from heaven: whereas it came only from the clouds^o; and was as earthly in its nature as if it had been formed like common bread. But Christ himself was the true bread^d: and He came down from heaven. His abode from all eternity had been in the bosom of his Father. And he was now come down from thence to be the food of his chosen people^e.]

2. In its properties—

[The manna, like any other bread, was suited only to the body; nor could it give life to that, but only maintain its life; and after all, the bodies which it nourished would die at last^f. But the true bread was intended for the soul. Nor would it merely support it when alive, but quicken it when dead^g. Yea, the soul, once quickened by it, should never die^h. Christ himself being their life, they should live *by* him hereⁱ, and *with* him for ever^k.]

3. In its uses—

[The manna was very confined as to its use. It was for one nation only; whereas the true bread is intended for the use of all mankind^l. It is *more extensively necessary*. The Israelites might as easily have been supported by other food. And we can find many substitutes for bread. But without Christ, no man can live^m. Neither earth nor heaven can provide a substitute for him. That bread is equally needed by every child of man. It is also *more extensively suitable*. Persons may be so disordered as to be incapable of enjoying, or even digesting, common bread. But in whatever state we be, Christ is the proper food of the soul. He is a bread, which is suited both, as milk, to babes, and, as strong meat, to them that are of full ageⁿ. Further, it is *more extensively satisfying*. The manna could supply but one want. Whatever abundance of bread we have, we may need a variety of other things, for want of which we may even perish. But if we have Christ, we have all things. We can want nothing which is good for the body^o; nor any thing that relates to the soul^p. He is food to the

^o ver. 32.

^d ver. 48.

^e ver. 51.

^f ver. 49.

^g ver. 33.

^h ver. 50, 58.

ⁱ ver. 57.

^k Col. iii. 4.

^l ver. 33. before cited.

^m ver. 53.

ⁿ ver. 54—56.

^o Matt. vi. 33.

^p ver. 35.

hungry, clothing to the naked, riches to the poor, health to the sick, life to the dead^a; He is ALL AND IN ALL^r.]

Such a glorious account of this bread being given by Christ himself, it becomes us to inquire into,

II. The means by which it may be obtained—

Every provision for the body must be obtained by labour; but this for the soul must be accepted as a free gift—

[We are extremely averse to stand indebted to another for our spiritual sustenance. We should be much better pleased to earn it by our own industry. But all our exertions for this end are fruitless. If we were to obtain an interest in Christ by our own works, salvation would no longer be of grace^s. We are therefore cautioned against every attempt to gain it in that way^t. We are expressly told that the Israelites were left for ever destitute of this bread, because they would persist in these self-righteous methods of obtaining it^u. We are exhorted to receive it freely, without money and without price^x.]

Nevertheless we are not to decline all kind of labour for it—

[We are to seek this bread in prayer^y, and in the use of all God's appointed ordinances. We are to exert ourselves as much in order to obtain it, as if the acquisition of it were the sole effect of our labour. But we are at the same time to depend as much upon God for it, as if we used no endeavours whatever to procure it. Nor is there any inconsistency in such a view of our duty. Our Lord himself says, "*Labour for the meat which the Son of man shall give you*."^z]

APPLICATION—

[Let us seek it by prayer and faith — — — Let us be thankful that it is sent us in such rich abundance — — — Let us gather it fresh every day and hour^a — — — Nor once attempt to hoard it for future use^b. There is a fulness in Christ to satisfy our every want — — — Nor shall we ever be refused if we plead with him as we ought to do^c. Let us remember, that in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare^d. And rest assured, that by feeding upon Christ, we shall find him to be meat indeed and drink indeed^e.]

^a Rev. iii. 18. 1 Cor. i. 30.

^b Rom. xi. 6.

^c Gal. v. 2—4.

^r Col. iii. 11.

^x Isai. lv. 1, 2.

^y The text.

^u Rom. ix. 30—32.

^s Exod. xvi. 16.

^t Exod. xvi. 19, 20.

^z John vi. 27.

^d Luke xv. 17, 18.

^e John vi. 55.

^c Matt. xv. 26—28.

MDCXXXIX.

CHRIST'S WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVE SINNERS.

John vi. 37. *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

IT is a pleasing reflection that there is a people secured to Christ, who, having been given to him by the Father, shall, each in his appointed time, "be gathered unto Shiloh," to be the fruits of his travail, and the spoils of his victory. This pleasure however would be greatly damped, if we believed, that there were any infallibly, and from eternity, given over to perdition, who should be sent into the world for no other purpose than to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to fit themselves for the place, to which they had been doomed by an eternal and irreversible decree. We confess that we cannot so draw the line between præterition and predestination, as to satisfy in all cases a cavilling, or perhaps a scrupulous mind; but the same difficulties occur, if we attempt to mark the distinct boundaries of free will, and free grace; or to shew how the existence of sin could ever consist with the holiness of God. This however is not our province: we must leave to God to reconcile the difficulties that occur; and receive the truths he declares, not because we can comprehend every thing respecting them, but because they are revealed by an unerring God. That some are secured to Christ appears from hence, that, if they were not, it might eventually happen, that none might come to him; and consequently, that he might shed his blood in vain. We are not however left to found this sentiment on any uncertain reasonings of our own; since our Lord himself, in the very words before the text, says, "All that the Father hath given me, shall come to me." But are all others therefore of necessity sealed up unto perdition? no; for he adds, "And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

To improve this blessed declaration, let us consider,

I. What we should come to Christ for—

[*In general*, we answer, that we must come to him for every thing; since all fulness is treasured up in him, on purpose that we may receive out of it according to our necessities. But *more particularly*, we must come to him for *pardon*, which we all need; which we cannot otherwise obtain; and which he is exalted to give^a. We must come for *peace*, since all peace derived from other quarters, is delusive, and he, as the Prince of peace, has promised to bestow it^b. We must come for *strength*, since without him we can do nothing^c, and by him, every thing^d; and St. Paul himself applied to him in prayer, and obtained from him, as we also shall do, grace sufficient for him^e. Lastly, we must come to him for *eternal life* and glory; since he frequently claims it as his prerogative to give it^f, and will surely be the author of it to all them that obey him^g.]

II. In what manner we should come to him—

[Of course, our Lord meant not that we were to approach him with our bodies; since many thronged him, and pressed upon him, who nevertheless were cast out. It is therefore, not to the motion of our bodies, but to the frame of our minds, that we are to have respect, when we come unto him. We must come unto him *empty*. If, like the Laodiceans, we think ourselves rich and increased with goods^h, our application to Christ will be vain and fruitlessⁱ. We must be deeply convinced of our own guilt and helplessness; and be thoroughly persuaded that we must perish if he receive us not. We must be like the Prodigal, when dying with hunger, or like the Disciples in jeopardy, crying, Save, Lord, or we perish^k. Moreover we must come *believing*. This is more particularly intended by our Lord, the words “coming” and “believing,” being perfectly synonymous^l. To come filled with unbelief, would be to insult, rather than to honour him. We should be convinced of his suitableness to our necessities, his sufficiency for our relief, and his willingness to receive us. We must regard him as the only way to life, the only door of hope^m. We must believe in him as appointed of God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemptionⁿ; and then we shall find by happy experience that he is “able to save us to the uttermost.”]

III. The encouragement we have to come to him—

^a Acts v. 31.^b Isai. ix. 6. John xiv. 27. Eph. ii. 17.^c John xv. 5. ^d 2 Cor. iii. 5.^e Phil. iv. 13.^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.^g John x. 28.^h Heb. v. 9.ⁱ Rev. iii. 17.^j Luke i. 53.^k Matt. viii. 25.^l ver. 35.^m John xiv. 6. and x. 9.ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 30.

[Though our Lord sometimes delayed answering the requests of those who came to him in the days of his flesh, he never finally refused any. Thus, though he may not instantly manifest his acceptance of us, he will not reject any who *thus* come unto him. *No past iniquities* shall cause him to reject us. This is evident from many strong and express declarations of Prophets^o, of Apostles^p, of Christ himself^q. If it be thought that the sin against the Holy Ghost is an exception, let it suffice to say, that no man, who desires to find acceptance through Christ, can possibly have committed that; since he would in that case have been given over to judicial blindness and obduracy, and consequently, would have continued altogether regardless of his eternal welfare. The same may be proved from manifold instances, wherein the vilest of the human race have found acceptance with him. We need only look at Manasseh^r, David^s, and above all at the Apostle Paul, who was in this particular intended for a pattern^t, and this blessed truth will be established beyond a possibility of doubt. *Nor will any present infirmities* cause our Lord to reject us. For his Disciples, long after they had found acceptance with him, betrayed manifest symptoms of pride^u, revenge^x, and cowardice^y; and Peter, whose misconduct was by far the most glaring, received by far the most striking tokens of our Lord's regard^z. We say not this to encourage sin, but to illustrate the tender mercies of HIM, who carries the lambs in his bosom, and who, instead of breaking the bruised reed, will bring forth from it the sweetest melody^a.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are afar off from Christ—

[Can it be supposed, that, if we will not go to Christ, we can ever participate his benefits? Doubtless we cannot: if we keep at a distance from him in this world, there will be an "impassable gulf between us" in the world to come. Let us remember then, that we *must* go to him or perish. Let not any one object, I *cannot* go: for the truth is, we *will* not^b. Yet, notwithstanding our past obstinacy, we *may* go to him, with a full assurance that he will *in no wise* cast us out. Let us not then delay, lest death seize us, and the door of mercy be for ever closed.]

^o Isai. i. 18.^q Matt. xii. 31.^r 2 Kings xxi. 16. with 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9, 12, 13.^s 2 Sam. xii. 9, 13.^t Mark ix. 33, 34.^u Matt. xxvi. 56.^x Isai. xl. 11. and xlii. 3.^p Acts x. 43. and 1 John i. 7.^q 1 Tim. i. 16.^r Luke ix. 54.^s Mark xvi. 7. and John xxi. 15—17.^t John v. 40.

c c 2

2. Those who are coming to him—

[We are told of one in the Gospel, whom, when coming to our Lord, the devil cast down, and tare, and left to appearance, dead^c. Such enmity will Satan discover against us also as soon as ever we attempt to come to Christ. He will raise every obstacle in his power: he will assault us by “fightings without, and fears within.” But the more earnest he is in his endeavours to draw us from Christ, the more determined let us be in going to Christ: so shall we most effectually defeat his malice, and secure beyond a doubt our own salvation.]

3. Those who have come to him—

[Whence is it that so great a difference has been put between you and others? Is it that you were of *yourselves* more inclined to good, and that you made yourselves to differ^d? No: you were once as far from God as any; nor had the smallest inclination to seek him till God gave you the will^e; nor could you then have come to Christ, except the Father had drawn you by his Almighty power^f. Be careful then to give all the glory of your salvation to God alone. And remember that you are still to be coming to Christ every day you live^g. “All your fresh springs are in him;” and “out of his fulness you must continually receive.” Live then a life of faith on the Son of God; and the communion, which you enjoy with him on earth, shall soon be perfected in the realms of glory.]

^c Mark ix. 20, 26.

^f John vi. 44.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^g Phil. ii. 13.

MDCXL.

MAN'S INABILITY TO COME TO CHRIST.

John vi. 44. *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*

THERE are in the Holy Scriptures many doctrines which prove an offence and a stumbling-block to the world: but the reason of their exciting disgust and aversion, must be looked for, not so much in the doctrines themselves, as in the depravity of the human heart. To a humble and contrite spirit every truth in the Bible will appear reasonable and worthy of God: it is the pride of man that takes offence at the sacred records, and that renders him unable to

receive the declarations of God. Our blessed Lord had told the Jews repeatedly, that he came down from heaven: they knowing his mother and his reputed father, could not endure that he should arrogate to himself such high honour: but he informed them, that the ground of the offence was within themselves; they were blinded by their own prejudices, and fettered by their own lusts, so that nothing but the almighty grace of God could ever draw them to him in a becoming manner.

Now this subject is *difficult*; we shall therefore *explain* it: it is *deemed objectionable*; and therefore we shall *assign the reasons* of it: it is *liable to abuse*; and therefore we shall *guard* it.

I. It is *difficult*, and therefore we shall *explain* it—

To “come to Christ” is to believe on him for salvation—

[It cannot refer to a mere bodily approach; because in that sense the assertion would not be true. Our Lord himself explains his meaning, and informs us, that to come to him is of the same import with believing in him^a. Our coming to him has respect to the characters which he sustains. Is he a Prophet? we must come to him for instruction: is he a Priest? we must come to him to make atonement for us: is he a King? we must come to him to deliver us from all our spiritual enemies. In whatever view he is represented in the Scriptures, whether as a sun to enlighten, a fountain to cleanse, a physician to heal, or as bread to support our lives, we should come to him, feeling our need of him under that very character, and relying on him to supply our every want.]

In order to this, we should experience the drawings of the Father—

[When we speak of “the Father drawing us,” we appear to some as if we ascribed to him an irresistible agency, and considered men as mere machines. But we entertain no such absurd unscriptural notions. It is not with the cords of a beast, or with force and violence, that God draws us, but, as the prophet well expresses it, “with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love^b,” that is, by rational considerations, and by the sweet attractions of his love. Perhaps this subject will be best understood by a familiar illustration. How was it that Jacob was drawn into Egypt? He was made to feel the

^a ver. 35.

^b Hos. xi. 4.

pressure of a very grievous famine: he was informed that there was plenty of corn in Egypt; and that his dearly-beloved Joseph was the Lord of all that land, and that he disposed of the good things thereof to whomsoever he would: he was told, moreover, that Joseph had expressly invited *him*; and had sent waggons for the conveyance of his family, together with abundance of provisions by the way: and finally, he was assured that, at the end of his journey, all the good of the land of Egypt should be his. Did he need, after this, to have a rope or chain fastened round him, and to be dragged into Egypt? No: all that he needed was faith, to believe the tidings; and when once he was fully persuaded of the truth of these things, he was willing of himself to go into that good land. It is thus that God draws his people: he causes us to feel our need of mercy; he informs us that our beloved Jesus has all heaven at his disposal; that he has sent to invite us to him, assuring us of whatever is needful by the way, and promising us all the glory of heaven at the end: and finally, he gives us faith to believe his testimony. Thus "he makes us willing in the day of his power*," and a thorough belief of these truths will bend the most stubborn heart, and overcome the most reluctant mind.]

Without these drawings we cannot come to Christ—

[We may give an assent to all the truths of the Gospel, and may profess an attachment to our Lord himself, without any such gracious influence; but we cannot really *come* to him in the manner before described, unless we be drawn by an almighty power. We can never apprehend him, till we are thus, as it were by a kind of magnetic influence, apprehended by him.]

Such is the plain import of the subject before us; but,

II. It is *deemed objectionable*, and therefore we shall *assign the reasons* of it—

There is no doctrine of the Bible that is loaded with more opprobrium than this: it is represented as grossly enthusiastic, and almost bordering on blasphemy. But the truth of it will immediately appear, if only we consider the grounds and reasons of it. It is founded,

1. On our *indisposition* to come to Christ—

[Consider what the coming to Christ implies: First it implies a sense of our lost state without him: and do men like

* Ps. cx. 3.

to feel themselves guilty and undone? do they feel no backwardness to confess that they are justly exposed to everlasting misery? Next, it implies a renunciation of all dependence on ourselves: and is this pleasing to corrupt nature? Are we willing to believe ourselves so utterly destitute of wisdom, righteousness, and strength, that we must be altogether dependent on Christ, as much as a new-born infant is on its parent? Next, it implies a turning from every thing that is displeasing to Christ: but have we no reluctance to mortify our besetting sins, and to forsake the habits, maxims, company, and interests of a polluted world? Lastly, it implies that we give ourselves entirely up to Christ, to walk in a state of holy communion with him, and unreserved obedience to his will: but does man naturally affect such a life as this? Is there nothing irksome to him in such restraints; nothing painful in such exertions?

Here then is one reason why we need the drawings of the Father in order to come to Christ. Our coming to Christ is altogether against the current of our corrupt nature^d: and as a river flowing to the ocean cannot turn back again to its source without the attractive influence of the heavenly bodies, so neither can we reverse all our natural habits and propensities, without the drawings of our heavenly Father.]

2, On our *impotency*—

[The impotency of man to do what is good is certainly rather of a moral than a natural kind: his inability is not like that which incapacitates him to stop the sun in the firmament: it consists principally in a want of inclination: yet, together with that, there is a positive weakness; there is even in a regenerate man “the flesh lusting against the Spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would^e.” St. Paul himself complained, that “to will was present with him; but how to perform that which was good, he found not:” that “the good which he would, he did not; and that the evil which he would not, that he did: that when he would do good, evil was present with him^f.” And who amongst us has not found the same? Who has not felt wanderings of mind, yea, and lamentable obduracy of heart, in those seasons when he has earnestly desired to maintain communion with his Lord and Saviour? Who has not been made sensible that he is like a becalmed vessel; and that he spreads the sails in vain, until the wind arise to bear him onward in his voyage?

We need not then to inquire after any other reasons for the doctrine in the text: our own experience, together with that of the saints in all ages, amounts to a demonstration of the

^d Rom. viii. 7. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e Gal. v. 17.

^f Rom. vii. 18, 19, 21.

point; more especially because it is confirmed by the strongest declarations of Holy Writ. God himself has told us, that without Christ we can *do* nothing^g; that we cannot, of ourselves, even *speak* a good word^h; nay, that we have not sufficiency even to *think* a good thoughtⁱ: that "God must give us both to will and to do^k." If then "our sufficiency even for these things must be of God," how much more must a Divine influence be necessary in order to our coming fully and habitually to Christ, as the life and strength of our souls!]

We must not however be satisfied with establishing this doctrine; for,

III. It is *liable to abuse*; and therefore we will *guard* it—

It is abused as much as any doctrine whatever;

1. By the ignorant and ungodly—

[When we tell them how they must come to Christ, and devote themselves to his service, they excuse themselves by saying that they cannot: and thus, in fact, they cast all the blame of their condemnation upon God, instead of taking it to themselves. But the impotency of which they complain is no excuse for them. Before they conclude themselves to be blameless, let them inquire, whether they do all that they *can*; whether they read, and meditate, and pray, and watch, and strive as much as they *can*? If they do not improve aright the strength they have, what reason have they to complain that God has not given them more? They will not so much as "frame their doings to turn unto the Lord:" and therefore they are as deserving of punishment, as if they had had all the power in their own hands: if they be not faithful in the few things which they have, there is no reason to think that they would have been faithful in more, if more had been committed to them. With this accords our Lord's own interpretation of such excuses, and the sentence he will pronounce on those who offer them^l: instead of standing excused before God, they will be condemned as wicked and unprofitable servants.

But such excuses are indeed the greatest aggravation of their guilt: for they amount only to this; "I love sin so much, that I cannot renounce it; and hate God so much, that I cannot bring my mind to love and serve him." And how would such an excuse sound in a court of judicature on behalf of a murderer? This man hates his fellow-creatures to such a degree, that he cannot help murdering them whenever he

^g John xv. 5.

^h Matt. xii. 34. and 1 Cor. xii. 3.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^k Phil. ii. 13.

^l Matt. xxv. 24—30.

can get them within his reach? Would the people say, 'Poor man, he ought not to be punished, for he cannot help it?' Would they not rather think, that the wickedness of his disposition was the greatest aggravation of his guilt, and that it would be the height of injustice to let him pass unpunished? The cases are altogether parallel: the conduct of each proceeds from his own depravity: and in either case increases, rather than diminishes, their desert of condemnation.]

2. By many professors of religion—

[Strange as it may seem, we must confess that there are many professors of religion who abuse most shamefully the doctrine of the text: I allude to Antinomian professors, who, when warned of their state, will plead their weakness in extenuation of their guilt, and will cast the blame on God, just as the ungodly themselves are wont to do. But if there be any people under heaven more offensive to God than others, surely these must be they. The ignorant and ungodly are quite innocent, when compared with these. Truly the excuses of an Antinomian professor are little short of blasphemy. O that all of that description might consider the fallacy and impiety of their pleas! But we would hope that no such professor is in this place: if however there should be one, we must declare unto him, that, whatever excuse he may make for his sinful practices or neglects, "he deceiveth his own soul, and his religion is vain." If God indeed were unwilling to help him, there might be some justice in his pleas. But who will dare to cast such a reflection upon him? The fault is only in the depraved wills of men: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." Let none then presume to charge God foolishly: if ever we would be right in his sight, we must trace all good to him, all evil to ourselves.]

ADDRESS—

1. To the self-confident—

[If you be not yet convinced of your need of Divine influences, go home, and try to perform some spiritual acts in your own strength: try to go to Christ with contrition; to cast yourself upon him with humble confidence; and to devote yourself to him in unreserved obedience. Do *this*, do it really, and with your whole heart, and we will retract all we have spoken, and confess either that the Bible is false, or that we have mistaken its true import. But we fear not the issue of such a trial: we are persuaded it would tend, more than any thing, to your conviction. Having within your own power the means of ascertaining the truth or falsehood of what you have heard, you will be utterly inexcusable if you neglect to do it.]

2. To the timid—

[Let it not be a source of discouragement to you that you feel your weakness : for “when you are weak, then are you strong.” Can you do nothing of yourselves? then live the more dependent upon God: and “he will perfect his strength in your weakness.” He has said, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, thou shalt thresh the mountains.” What a labour is this to be performed by a worm! yet it shall be done. Trust then in him, and be of good courage: and He who “sent Christ to you,” will draw you to him, and he who draws you to him, will accomplish in you all his good pleasure, till you are “raised at last” to a full enjoyment of his presence and glory.]

MDCXLI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING BY FAITH ON CHRIST.

John vi. 53—55. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*

THE natural man neither does nor can understand spiritual truths^a. This inspired declaration has been verified in all ages. The Samaritan woman shewed how unapt we are to receive spiritual instruction^b. Even Nicodemus formed the most absurd conceptions of our Lord's meaning^c: such also was the blindness of the Jews to whom our Lord addressed this discourse^d. He, however, in compassion to them, proceeded to confirm his gracious declarations. May we experience the illuminating and constraining influences of divine grace^e, while we consider,

I. What is meant by eating the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood—

Great caution is necessary in explaining the figurative expressions of Scripture. We shall endeavour to exhibit the full scope of the metaphor, without pressing it too far. It is sufficiently obvious that the text

^a 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^b John iv. 14, 15.

^c John iii. 3, 4.

^d ver. 41, 52.

^e ver. 44, 45.

is not to be understood in a *literal* sense; nor does it relate to the *sacrament*, that being not yet instituted; nor does it signify the giving a *mere assent* to our Lord's doctrines.

[The doctrines of the Gospel are sometimes represented as bread and wine; and our Lord may be considered as speaking of his doctrines when he speaks of himself as the bread of life. But he could not intend a *mere assent* to those doctrines by the metaphor of eating. If this were all that he meant, Judas and Simon Magus were truly possessed of eternal life^f.]

Our Lord explains the eating of him as synonymous with believing on him^g: but to speak more particularly, the metaphor of eating the flesh of Christ, &c. implies,

1. An union with his person—

[The doctrine of our union with Christ is set forth by a great variety of images in Scripture. It naturally arises from the metaphor in the text^h. It is particularly mentioned by our Lord in the two verses followingⁱ.]

2. A trust in his sacrifice—

[Our Lord speaks of his flesh expressly in reference to his sacrifice^k. The words which he used at the institution of his Last Supper confirm this idea. The *eating* of his flesh therefore can mean no less than a *trust* in that sacrifice.]

3. A dependence on his grace—

[What animal food is to the body, *that* the grace of Christ is to the soul. Unless we have recourse to Christ continually, we must fall and perish^l.]

According to this view of the metaphor, it is worthy of the deepest attention.

II. The importance of the doctrine—

This is abundantly manifest, from the words before us. There is nothing so important as a life of faith on Christ: nothing,

^f Acts viii. 23. Mark xiv. 21.

^g ver. 35.

^h Eph. iii. 17. Col. i. 27.

ⁱ From hence it appears, that as our bodily life is upheld by the invisible operation of our food within us, and as the spiritual life of Jesus was maintained by the indwelling of the Deity within him; so the eating of him is, in fact, an union with him, and shall ever be accompanied by the invisible supports of his Spirit and grace.

^k ver. 51.

^l John xv. 5.

1. So necessary—

[The greatest of all concerns is the salvation of the soul : but that cannot be effected by any other means. The person who does not live on Christ, has no spiritual life: he may have wealth, and honour, learning, and even morality (in some sense), but he has no life^m: he may even “have a name to live, but he is really deadⁿ;” and his spiritual death will issue in death eternal°. What then can be so necessary as to believe in Christ?]

2. So beneficial—

[The possession of the whole world is not to be compared with eternal life: yet life eternal is secured by eating the flesh of Christ. As for past sins, they shall be no bar to our obtaining of this blessing^p. Indeed, “the believer has already eternal life” in his soul. He has *a title to it*, confirmed by the promise and oath of Jehovah^q. He has also *the earnest of it*, since this communion with Christ is heaven begun on earth^r: and the Saviour in whom he trusts, will raise him up at the last day” to the complete and everlasting enjoyment of it.]

3. So excellent—

[They may be said to “feed on ashes,” who have no higher gratifications than those which are derived from carnal indulgences: but “the body and blood of Christ are meat indeed, and drink indeed.” Nothing affords such unspeakable delight as the exercise of faith on Christ^s: nor has any thing such a transforming efficacy on the soul^t. Surely, if the manna was “angels’ food^u,” much more is the body and blood of Christ.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are disregarding this heavenly banquet—

[Would to God that you would consider *Who* it is that utters the declarations in the text! and that you would mark *the energetic manner* in which he utters them! Think you that his words are false, or that they shall ever be reversed? Ah! cast away the husks on which you are feeding; and live, as the Apostle did, by faith on the Son of God^x.]

2. Those who doubt whether they may partake of it—

^m 1 John v. 11, 12.ⁿ Rev. iii. 1.^o Rev. xxi. 8.^p Heb. viii. 12.^q Heb. vi. 17, 18.^r Eph. i. 14.^s 1 Pet. i. 8.^t 2 Cor. iii. 18.^u Ps. lxxviii. 25.^x Gal. ii. 20.

[The whole of our Lord's discourse to the Jews shews that all were, not only at liberty, but bound, to feed on him; and we are commanded to invite, yea, to compel, you to come to this glorious feast⁷. Indeed, to whom else will ye go? and on what else will ye feed? Come then, and "eat and drink abundantly, O beloved⁸;" and rest assured, that they who come hungry, shall never be sent empty away.]

⁷ Isai. xxv. 6. with Luke xiv. 23.

⁸ Cant. v. 1.

MDCXLII.

THE GOSPEL A GROUND OF OFFENCE.

John vi. 60. *Many therefore of his Disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*

THE Gospel, to those who have obtained just views of it, is simplicity itself: but to those who are not taught of God, it is utter foolishness. When the prophets taught the people, their hearers, instead of "believing their report^a," were ready to exclaim, "Ah! Lord God, doth he not speak parables^b?" In like manner, when our blessed Lord, "who spake as never man spake^c," addressed to his followers as rich and instructive a discourse as any that is contained in the sacred volume, they said among themselves, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?"

We shall find it not unprofitable to consider,

I. What was the saying at which they were so greatly offended—

In substance it was, that his people must live by faith in him—

[This he had spoken plainly: "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst." But he had also represented it under a figure which they did not understand. He had been challenged by his hearers to give any proof of *his* divine mission, equal to that which Moses had given to the Jewish people, in the wilderness, by supplying them with manna from heaven for forty years: and, in answer to that challenge, our Lord drew a parallel between the manna and

^a Isai. liii. 1.

^b Ezek. xx. 49.

^c John vii. 46.

himself, whom that manna typified^d — — and required that all should live by faith in him for the salvation of their souls, as their forefather did on the manna for the sustenance of their bodies.]

This filled them with extreme astonishment and disgust—

[That he should speak of himself as “coming down from heaven,” was unaccountable; since they knew, as they supposed, his earthly parentage, as well as they did that of any other man^e — — That he should speak of “giving them his flesh to eat,” was equally incomprehensible; since they could annex no idea to it but that which was too horrible to think of^f — — Then, as to the consequences that he spake of, as infallibly arising to them from their eating, or declining to eat, his flesh, they could not endure to hear such assertions from his lips.

Hence they “murmured” among themselves; and declared it all to be utterly unintelligible, and unworthy to be received by any rational being. *Their confidence*, in relation to this view of it, is strongly expressed in that pointed interrogation, “Who can hear it?” And so strong was *their disgust* at it, that “from that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him^g.” So general, too, was this feeling, that it seemed as if the Apostles themselves would follow the example of his other Disciples^h.]

But that to which I would more especially call your attention is, to inquire,

II. Whence it was that it proved so particularly offensive to them?

It should seem that they were offended because of,

1. The strangeness of the image—

[Never had they heard any thing like it before. Had he spoken of himself as a sacrifice, they might have more readily received the idea of “eating his flesh;” because, under their own law, the offenders in many cases partook of their own sacrifices. But even then, as they knew nothing of human sacrifices, it would have proved sufficiently dark and unintelligible to them. But when he spake of “drinking his blood,” it was disgusting to them in the extreme: for not even the prohibitions relative to idolatry were stronger than those which related to the tasting of blood. If they viewed it *literally*,

^d Here the parallel may be drawn from the context. See Discourse on ver. 53—55.

^e ver. 41, 42.

^f ver. 52.

^g ver. 66.

^h ver. 67.

they could regard it in no other light than as a *savage ordinance*, too horrible to think of: and of a *spiritual* or *mystical* import their minds could form no conception; since nothing that they had ever heard of could at all lead them to such a thought. Hence it is not surprising that they should be stumbled at what they were so utterly unable to comprehend. If so learned and excellent a man as Nicodemus was confounded at the mention of a new birth, we cannot wonder that Disciples of a more uneducated class should be offended at an image so gross, and remote from common apprehension, as that of eating human flesh, and drinking human blood.]

2. The sublimity of the sentiments contained in it—

[They saw that some deep mystery was contained in this image, though they were unable to unravel it. The food of which Jesus spake was not to nourish life, but to *give* it; and not to the body, but to the *soul*; and not of one people only, but of the *whole* world; and not for a few years, but *for ever and ever*. What could all this mean? The manna had never restored so much as one dead man to life; nor had it kept even Moses himself from dying: yet the flesh and blood of Christ were to do this, and infinitely more, for all who would partake of it, even to the very end of time. "What shall we say to such assertions as these? How can they be credited? How can any man listen to them for a moment?" Yes: such, I say, might well be the murmurings of those who understood not his sayings.]

3. The meanness of him who promulgated these sentiments—

[Had he been a mighty monarch, who, like the kings of the earth, had the command of life and death, his hearers might have annexed some idea to his words. But they were uttered by a poor man, who "had not for himself so much as a place where to lay his head," and was attended only by a few poor fishermen. What could *such* a person mean, by asserting things which would appear extravagant beyond all endurance, if uttered by the greatest monarch upon earth? Doubtless the unsuitableness of his pretensions to his present appearance must have tended exceedingly to increase the difficulty of apprehending the just import of his words.]

4. The contrariety of the sentiments to all the notions they had ever imbibed—

[In addition to all the difficulties arising from the figures that were used, an insurmountable objection to the reception of them arose from the sentiments which they seemed intended to convey. If they had any meaning at all, it must be, that,

in some way or other, the souls of men were to live by him, and by him alone. But how could this be? What must become of all the ordinances of the Ceremonial Law, and all the precepts of the Moral Law? Must all these, without exception, be put aside; and nothing be of any avail, but the eating of this man's flesh, and the drinking of his blood?

That this was a particular stumbling-block in their way, is highly probable, from the very question which was put to our Lord, and from which the whole discourse originated. "They said unto him, What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sentⁱ." What! Is *this* the great work that we have to do? Is *faith in him* the great duty, by means of which we are to find acceptance with God? What then becomes of Moses, and of all the precepts, whether ceremonial or moral, that he has enjoined?

Let us put ourselves into the place of the people whom our Lord addressed, and take into consideration these various difficulties which they had to contend with; and, though we cannot but severely blame, we shall be inclined, I think, to pity also, the fatal resolution which they adopted on this occasion.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have an insight into this mystery—

["Blessed are the eyes that see the things that ye see." We have very little conception what privileges we enjoy, even above those who attended the ministry of our Lord himself. We are enabled to compare one part of Scripture with another, and to see both the character of our Lord as God and man, and the accomplishment of the whole Mosaic economy in him. The things, therefore, that were stumbling-blocks to his hearers, are not so to us: and the things which were veiled in impenetrable darkness to them, are as resplendent as the day to us. Nor do we merely comprehend the Gospel as one harmonious whole, revealed at successive periods from the fall of man; but we are enabled to enjoy in our own souls, and to attest, from personal experience, that Christ's "flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed^k." Be thankful then, beloved, for this inestimable benefit; and, as the Israelites in the wilderness subsisted altogether on the bread from heaven, so live ye on "the true bread from heaven," even "on the Son of God, who hath loved you, and given himself for you."]

2. Those who are not yet able to receive it—

[Do not imagine, that because many things in the Gospel appear absurd to you, they are therefore of necessity absurd in

ⁱ ver. 28, 29.

^k ver. 55.

themselves: for you cannot but know, that, in human sciences, there are many things which, if they were stated to you with the greatest clearness, you would not be able to comprehend: and therefore you may well expect the same in that deepest of all mysteries, the redemption of the world by the blood and righteousness of our incarnate God. The truth is, that this mystery cannot be understood, unless our eyes be opened by the Son of God, and a spiritual understanding be given to us, whereby to discern the things of the Spirit¹. Let me, then, guard you against precipitancy in judging of the things which you are not able to comprehend: but lift up your hearts to God in prayer, that his Spirit may be given you, and that by that Spirit you may be guided into all truth. Perhaps the images of Scripture may offend you; or the declarations of it may appear too harsh. But remember, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, says our Lord, are spirit and life." Though therefore, if taken in a carnal sense, they may be, as doubtless in many cases they are, foolishness itself^m, yet, viewed according to their true import, they are "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believethⁿ."]

¹ 1 John v. 20.^m 1 Cor. ii. 14.ⁿ Rom. i. 16.

MDCXLIII.

CHRIST THE ONE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

John vi. 67—69. *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

IT was said of our Lord by the aged patriarch who took him in his arms at his presentation in the temple, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed:" and this discovery of men's characters was universally produced by his ministrations. Nor was it occasioned by his doctrines only, but frequently by the manner in which they were promulgated. His discourses abounded much in parabolical and figurative representations, which cast a

veil of obscurity over them, and served as a touchstone to try the spirits of those who heard him. His statement of the new birth was for a time a stumbling-block to Nicodemus, who knew not what interpretation to put upon his words: and in like manner, his discourse respecting "eating his flesh and drinking his blood" offended many; insomuch that "they went back, and walked no more with him." His own Apostles scarcely knew how to receive his word; so that it seemed as if they also would depart from him. But they were of a more humble and teachable spirit; and therefore, when our Lord asked, if they also intended to forsake him, they expressed their abhorrence of such an idea, and their determination to adhere to him at all events.

I. *The question which our Lord put to his Disciples demands our first consideration—*

Though it related to one particular occasion, it is suited to convey much general instruction. It shews us,

1. That the best of men are liable to depart from God—

[This is a truth of infinite importance, which yet many are very averse to hear. But who can doubt it in reference to *himself*? Who does not feel that he himself may fall, and that too into grievous sin, and into final condemnation? Advocates for human systems may say what they please on this subject; but there is not an humble Christian in the universe who does not feel this to be true in reference to himself: and if any choose to deny it, we shall oppose to him the example of the Apostle Paul, who "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^a." In ourselves we are weak as new-born babes: it is God alone "that can keep us from falling;" and if ever we be saved at all, we must be "kept by the power of God unto salvation^b."

But there is not that opposition between this doctrine and that of the perseverance of the saints that some imagine. A mother's care is a pledge for the security of her child: but that does not set aside the liability of the child to perish by hunger or cold, or a thousand other accidents; any of which things

^a 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^b Jude, ver. 24. 1 Pet i. 5

may at any time occur by the carelessness or death of its nurse. Thus our security is not in ourselves, but in our God: if left to ourselves for one moment, we should perish: and all our hope is in the tender care and mercy of our God. The only difference between the child and us is, that its guardian is weak and mortal; whereas ours is the almighty and unchangeable Jehovah, in whose power and fidelity alone our advantage consists.]

2. That the defection of some endangers the stability of others—

[We are easily wrought upon by the influence of bad example. "The mixed multitude in the wilderness fell a lusting," and soon drew after them the whole nation of Israel^c. In the Gospels too we have many melancholy instances of the readiness even of good men to follow each other in what is evil. Peter, full of self-confidence, presumed to declare, that "though he should be called to die with his Lord, he would not deny him:" and then we are told, "Likewise also said all the Disciples^d;" so speedily were they led away by his example. On another occasion, we find them *all* "murmuring and full of indignation" about the expense which had been incurred for the purpose of honouring their Lord: and, when we come to inquire whence it originated, we trace it all to Judas, who was a thief, and wanted to steal the money for his own use^e. The instance of Barnabas also, and other Jewish Christians, who were led away by Peter's dissimulation, is precisely in point. Indeed, who that is at all conversant with the Christian world, has not seen, on many occasions, how rapidly a bad spirit in one diffuses itself through a whole Church? Good instruction and example operate very slowly and partially; but that which is evil spreads apace: "a little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump." It becomes us then to be on our guard against the contagion of evil. Doubtless these apostates thought that they had reason enough to forsake our Lord: but if we were left, like Paul, unsupported and unacknowledged by the whole Christian world^f, it would become us, like him, to maintain our steadfastness, and to "cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart."]

3. That we ought to watch the first motions and tendencies of our own hearts to evil—

^c Numb. xi. 4.

^d Matt. xxvi. 35.

^e One Evangelist mentions only in general terms that "*some*" were thus affected: Mark xiv. 4, 5. Another tells us who they were, even all "*the Disciples*:" Matt. xxvi. 8. And another tells us who was the first instigator, and by what principle he was actuated. John xii. 4—6.

^f 2 Tim. iv. 16.

[The twelve had evidently participated in the feelings of the other Disciples, though not to the same extent. This our Lord saw; and therefore bade them come to a decision. Happy was it for them that the bias of their minds was the right way: and happy for them that they were called upon to decide, before the evil had got too deep a root in their minds. Had they been left to "go back, and walk no more with Jesus," how bitterly would they have lamented it to all eternity! Let us then be aware of the tendency of evil thoughts, and guard against their first introduction into the mind. If we be tempted for a moment to account any thing "a hard saying," or to turn aside in the smallest degree from the path of duty, let us remember, that they who draw back, "draw back unto perdition;" and that "if any man draw back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in him^s."]

Such was the instructive nature of our Lord's question: and,

II. *The answer of Peter was worthy of an inspired Apostle—*

Peter was forward on all occasions to speak his mind; and often spoke but unadvisedly at best. But on this occasion he returned, both for himself and all his brethren, an answer fraught with wisdom. Two grounds he states for the determination which all of them had formed to adhere to Christ;

1. *The insufficiency of the creature—*

[The conviction of his mind on this subject was very strong; insomuch that he ventured even to appeal to Christ himself, and to defy, if I may so speak, Omniscience itself to tell him, where any other refuge could be found, or any other source of solid good: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" 'We are in pursuit of *instruction*: who can give it us, if we turn our back on thee? We are in pursuit of *happiness*: where can we find it, but in thee? We are bent upon the attainment of *heaven*: who can bring us thither, but thyself? If we go back to the world and cast off all care for these things, nothing but everlasting destruction awaits us: and if we go to the Scribes and Pharisees, we have had evidence enough what kind of teachers they are, "blind leaders of the blind." To whom then can we go, with the smallest prospect of attaining what we are seeking after?']

Now this part of Peter's answer furnishes us with a good reply to all who would turn us from the Lord. "To whom,

or what, would you turn me?—to the world? I have found its emptiness. To sin? I know its bitterness. To formality? I have felt its incompetency to satisfy my mind and conscience. My God tells me that “CHRIST is all:” and I am constrained from daily experience to say to him, “Whom have I in heaven but *thee*? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides *thee*.” Whatever advantages were proposed to us as an inducement to turn back from Christ, we should regard the proposal as absurd and impious as that which was made by the Israelites of old^b—]

2. The all-sufficiency of Christ—

[Our Lord had frequently asserted in the foregoing discourse, that “he would give eternal life to those who should eat his flesh and drink his blood.” Peter, in his answer, refers to that; and professes confidently, in the name of all the other Apostles, that the words of Christ pointed out the only true way to life, and that Christ himself was that very Messiah, who was authorized and commissioned to bestow life: “Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, &c.”

This was a glorious confession, and an ample reason for the determination they had formed to remain firm in his cause. Whither should they go for water, when they had the fountain near them? “True it was, that at the present it was, in a measure, a fountain sealed;” yet not so sealed, but that it always afforded them an abundant supply for their present necessities; and in due time it would be opened to the whole world, and flow unto the ends of the earth. They were persuaded that he would impart to them living water; and that, “if only they drank of the water that he should give them, they should never die.” O that every Christian in this day felt the same confident persuasion! In vain would the world, and the flesh, and the devil combine their efforts to destroy him: he would determine with Joshua, that though the whole world should become servants to *them*, “he and his house would serve the Lord!”]

APPLICATION—

Who amongst you are disposed to walk with Jesus?

[This may be done *now* in the exercise of faith and prayer, precisely as Enoch and Noah “walked with God” in the days of old. It is every Christian’s privilege to do so^c. Be assured, that, however the world may be offended at Christ, he is an able Instructor, a kind Master, a faithful Friend, and an all-sufficient Saviour — — —]

^b Numb. xiv. 3, 4.

^c Josh. xxiv. 15.

^d 1 John i. 3.

Are there any amongst us that have turned back from him ?

[Alas ; there are apostates now, as well as in former times. But what has any one gained by departing from Christ ? Is he happier than he was when he sat at the Saviour's feet and heard his words ? There is but one testimony on this head from all the children of men : " In observing lying vanities, they have forsaken their own mercies " — — — Think then from whence ye are fallen, and say, " I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now " — — —]

To those who are walking steadily with him,

[We would address those words of the Apostle, " Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." If even the Apostles were ready to start aside, who has not need to watch and pray lest he also enter into temptation ? Awful is that admonition of our Lord, " Remember Lot's wife." If you would endure unto the end, you must be teachable as little children ; and be determined, through God's assistance, to " die with Christ, rather than forsake him."]

¹ Jonah ii. 8.

² Hos. ii. 7.

MDCXLIV.

NO SAVIOUR BUT THE LORD JESUS.

John vi. 67—69. *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away ? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

NOTHING is more common than for persons to take offence at the word of God itself. Sometimes its strictness offends them ; sometimes its harshness and severity ; sometimes its mysteriousness and sublimity. Nicodemus could not receive what was spoken to him about the new birth : the Samaritan woman could not comprehend the idea of living water : and the hearers of our Lord were altogether indignant, when he discoursed to them about giving them his flesh to eat. Indeed, this saying appeared to them so hard, so strange, and so absurd, that a great number of them departed from him, and walked no more

with him. Even the Apostles themselves were evidently stumbled at it; insomuch, that our Lord, with a mixture of surprise and pity, asked them, "Will ye also go away?" The answer which St. Peter gave him, in the name of all the rest, will lead me to shew you *the grounds of a Christian's adherence to Christ*. He determinately cleaves to Christ,

I. Because there is salvation for him in no other—

[We may conceive the Apostle speaking to this effect: "Lord, to whom shall we go? We are seeking after salvation: we are desiring to obtain peace with God: we want to find rest for our souls. Whither can we go for any of these things?"

Now, in like manner, may every Christian say, 'To whom shall I go, to remove the burthen of my sins? If I go to the *world*, it may dissipate my thoughts for a moment; but it can bring no solid peace to my soul. Its cares, its pleasures, its company, can do nothing towards healing the pangs, or silencing the accusations, of a guilty conscience: they may suspend, but can never remove, my sorrows: or rather, if they cause me to forget my sins for a little time, it is only that they may press upon me afterwards with an accumulated weight, and leave me a more awful prey to guilt and shame and misery. If I go to the *Law*, and seek to pacify my mind by an obedience to its commands, I find no success. I feel a consciousness that I can never atone for the sins I have already committed: I am sensible, too, that, in spite of all my endeavours, I cannot fulfil its demands: I come short in every thing I do: and I hear it thundering out its anathemas against me; saying, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." I perceive that I can never establish such a righteousness as shall avail for my acceptance before God. I am therefore shut up to that way of salvation which thou, my Lord, hast revealed. Nothing but fear or terror haunts me, whether I endeavour to forget my sins, or to make an atonement for them: and I can find none but Jesus that can afford me the desired relief.']

A further ground on which a Christian adheres to Christ is,

II. Because he is both able and willing to save—

["Thou hast the words of eternal life," said this blessed Apostle. The preceding discourse alone abundantly warranted this assertion: for, in it, Jesus had declared, in the strongest terms, that "he would give eternal life*," that "whosoever

* ver. 27.

should come to him, and believe in him, should never hunger, never thirst^b;" that "of those who should come to him, he would never cast out one^c;" that "all who should see him and believe in him should assuredly have everlasting life^d;" yea, that they were at that very moment in actual possession of it^e; that he had come down from heaven on purpose to bestow it on all who would seek it through him^f: that, as the Jews had subsisted upon manna in the wilderness, so all who would eat his flesh, and drink his blood, should subsist by him^g, and *that* not for a time only, but for ever^h. Now what could all this mean? Could any declaration be more full, more rich, more suitable to men sojourning in this dreary wilderness?

Thus, then, may every believer say: for the whole Scripture teems with invitations and promises from this adorable Saviour, and especially to those who feel their need of mercy at his hands. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burthen is lightⁱ." "If *any man* thirst, let him come unto me, and drink: and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water^k. Here is no exception: the only requisite for acceptance with him is, that we feel our need of him, and come to him to quench our thirst.

What can we want more? Let our wants be ever so great, he has a fulness adequate to the supply of them: and let our unworthiness be ever so great, our sense of that unworthiness shall be our best recommendation to him: nor shall our incapacity to offer him any thing in return for these benefits be any bar to our acceptance: since they are all offered freely, "without money and without price^l." Shall we then decline going to him? or, having gone to him, shall we ever depart from him? God forbid!]

But the Christian will yet more determinately adhere to him,

III. Because he is expressly appointed to that very office—

[Of this the Apostles were assured: "We believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God." It had been foretold that the Messiah should appear, on purpose "to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make

^b ver. 35.

^c ver. 47.

^d ver. 58.

^e Isai. lv. 1.

^f ver. 37.

^g ver. 51.

^h Matt. xi. 28—30.

ⁱ ver. 40.

^j ver. 54—56.

^k John vii. 37, 38.

reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness" for his believing people^m. This person was to be no other than "the Son of the Living Godⁿ." And that Jesus was this very person, the Apostles had no doubt. They had seen the miracles which Jesus had wrought in confirmation of his divine mission, those very miracles to which Jesus himself had appealed in proof of his Messiahship^o: and they could not doubt but that he was the very person to whom all the Law and the Prophets had borne witness, as the appointed Saviour.

Now, if the Apostles at that time "were sure" of this truth, how much more may *we* be assured, who have seen his whole work completed, in his death upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead according to his word, his ascension into heaven, and his sending down of the Holy Spirit, to testify of him, and to establish his kingdom in the world? Methinks we might as well doubt our own existence, as call in question his Messiahship, and his express ordination of God to be the Saviour of the world.

Shall we, then, look out for any other? or, having believed in him, shall we for a moment suffer any other to stand in competition with him? No, Lord: we believe, and are sure, that thou art sent of God to this very office; and we will know none but Thee, none but Thee.]

Here I would put a QUESTION or two, by way of bringing home the subject more fully to our souls.

Having taken for granted that we all are following the Lord Jesus, I have forborne hitherto to inquire respecting it. Let me, however, entreat you to supply that defect, and to examine carefully whether you have ever come to Christ aright? Deceive not yourselves, I pray you, in relation to this matter: for the everlasting salvation of your souls depends upon it. Have you seen that there is no hope for you in any thing but in his atoning blood? Have you renounced all dependence upon your own righteousness; and are you trusting altogether in his obedience unto death? — — — Unless this be clearly ascertained, you are not prepared to enter on the consideration of the questions which I would wish to propose to you. But, supposing that you are indeed believers in Christ, I ask,

1. Will you depart from him?

^m Dan. ix. 24.

ⁿ Ps. ii. 7.

^o Matt. xi. 2—5.

[Whom or what will you place in competition with him? — — — Perhaps you are not at present tempted in any particular way to depart from him. But be assured that you will be: for there is not any true follower of Christ who does not, sooner or later, meet with trials to prove his sincerity. You may not be called to “resist unto blood:” but you cannot fail to meet with smaller persecutions, such as contempt and ridicule, and the hatred of an ungodly world, perhaps too even of your nearest friends. What, then, is the state of your minds in reference to these things? Are you enabled, through grace, to honour Christ, and to set at defiance all your enemies? If you see others turning back, (for what age is there which does not witness many apostasies?) are you the more determined, through grace, to “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart?” Are you saying, as Ruth to Naomi, “Nothing but death (no, nor death itself) shall part between thee and me.” You must not indeed be making resolutions, and, in dependence on your own strength, be saying, “Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I:” but your daily prayer must be, that you may be kept steadfast unto the end: for it is only by being “faithful unto death, that you can ever attain a crown of life.”]

2. Will you not endeavour to bring all you can to him?

[Surely, if you are fully persuaded that “there is no other name under heaven but his, whereby man can be saved,” you will labour according to your ability to bring men to the knowledge of him. You cannot but pity the poor deceived world, who are going after lying vanities, whilst you have found a refuge for your souls. Go, look around you: go and see what empty cisterns men hew out to themselves, whilst your thirst is quenched at the fountain-head. Go to the places of public resort, and see what a poor vain portion the worldlings have. Verily, their best pleasures are but as the crackling of thorns under a pot; a fire that blazes for a moment, and then expires in smoke and melancholy. Have compassion on them, and tell them of the Saviour you have found: and, whilst you labour to instruct the ignorant, exert yourselves to the utmost to confirm the wavering, and to bring back the sheep that have been driven away.]

Extend your views, also, to the heathen world. Alas! to what refuges of lies have they recourse! Behold their idols of wood and stone, that cannot so much as move themselves, much less assist their votaries! Behold the painful and cruel rites which *they* observe, in order to recommend themselves to the favour and approbation of their imaginary deities! Can you be acquainted with the Saviour, and not wish to make him known to *them*? Can you be in possession of “the words

of eternal life," and not endeavour to put into their hands that blessed volume in which they are contained? Surely, next to a personal adherence to him, *this* must be your duty: and, if you are his Disciples indeed, I feel no doubt but that you will engage in this blessed work with an affectionate solicitude for the welfare of your fellow-creatures, and an ardent zeal for the honour of your God^a.]

^p If this were for a *Mission Society*, or *Bible Society*, here would be the place for enlargement on the subject.

^q This was written at the distance of many years from that which precedes it, and without the slightest recollection that the text had ever been treated before. But the two are so entirely different from each other, the one being more scientific, (if it may be so called) and the other altogether popular, that they are both inserted as specimens of two very different ways of treating the same text, and as answering in a slight degree the end which is more studiously consulted in the four skeletons at the end of Claude's Essay.

MDCXLV.

ONE OF THE APOSTLES A DEVIL.

John vi. 70. *Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?*

OUR blessed Lord and Saviour, in the whole of his deportment, was meek and gentle: yet, when occasion called to it, he exercised a holy fidelity even towards his beloved Apostles. They had now all confessed him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God;" and had declared their determination still to adhere to him, however others of his Disciples might be offended at him, and induced to forsake him^a. On this account they might be led to value themselves on their steadfastness, or perhaps feel themselves offended, when they should find, at a future period, that one of their own body was a traitor. Our Lord, therefore, warned them both against self-confidence at the present time, and against that discouragement which they would hereafter feel, when they should behold him delivered up to death through the instrumentality of one of his own most highly-favoured

^a ver. 66—69.

Apostles; saying, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

Now, if you doubt not the Saviour's love in giving this solemn warning to his followers, let not *me* be thought harsh, if I call your attention to it,

I. As delivered to the Apostles—

God in every age has of his own sovereign will and pleasure, chosen, irrespective of any merit in themselves, the objects of his more especial favour—

[Even in heaven did he choose some of the angelic host in preference to others, whom, in his righteous judgment, he suffered to fall and perish: on which account they who "kept their first estate" are called his "elect angels". And after man also had sinned, God chose our fallen race in preference to the fallen angels; providing a Saviour for us, when he had made no such provision for them. To various offices also has he chosen men, as Moses, to bring his people out of Egypt; Aaron and his descendants, to officiate in the priesthood, whilst the descendants of Moses were only Levites; and Saul and David to exercise the royal functions in Jerusalem; and Cyrus, three hundred years before any such person existed in the world, to restore his people from Babylon. The whole Jewish people were "chosen by God to be to him a holy nation, and a peculiar treasure to him above all the people upon earth". In like manner our blessed Saviour chose his twelve Apostles. "They did not choose him, but he them"; calling one from his nets, and another from the receipt of custom; and afterwards another, in the midst of his most hostile purposes, and blood-thirsty pursuits. He appealed to them, "Have not I chosen you twelve?" Have I not distinguished you above others, to be my stated attendants, and to be instructed by me with all imaginable clearness in the things which to others are revealed only in parables?]

But though, in external circumstances, there is a great resemblance between the elect, there is often a sad difference between them—

[As, amongst the Jews, "all were not Israel who were of Israel", so all the elect are not "elect unto salvation": as we clearly see amongst the chosen Apostles, one of whom was, and remained to the last, "a devil." In their call they were alike, as they were also in their endowments (the power of working

^b 1 Tim. v. 21.

^c Deut. vii. 6.

^d John xv. 16.

^e Acts xxii. 14.

^f Luke viii. 10.

^g Rom. ix. 6.

^h 2 Thess. ii. 13.

miracles), their outward conduct, and their usefulness. On one occasion, Judas seemed to be the most excellent of all the Apostles: for, when a very precious box of ointment, which might have been sold for three hundred pence (almost ten pounds) and been given to the poor, was poured upon the head and feet of our blessed Lord, *he was the first* to complain of the waste; and he it was who inspired all the rest of the Apostles with "indignation against it," as an act of insufferable extravagance. True, indeed, his motives were not very pure (as we are told¹); but of them the Apostles neither knew, nor suspected any thing. On the contrary, when, at the close of our Saviour's life, he told his Disciples that one of them would betray him, every one of them suspected himself rather than Judas, so correct had been his outward deportment during the whole period of our Lord's ministry on earth. But during that whole time, Judas, who had been entrusted by our Lord as the purse-bearer for them all, had pilfered money in small quantities from the bag (had he stolen largely, the money would have been missed); and so hardened did he become through his dishonest practices, that at last he sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, and delivered him up into the hands of his enemies. This reigning lust of covetousness shewed, that, in the midst of all his professions, he was at heart no better than a devil, and that he might be justly designated by that opprobrious name.]

And may we not consider this warning,

II. As delivered to us—

Yes, we also are God's chosen people—

[As *Christians*, we are chosen above all the rest of the world, not one-sixth part of which has ever heard of the name of Christ. As *Protestants*, too, we are favoured of Almighty God to be delivered from the superstitions of Popery, and from the deplorable bondage in which the Popish community is held. And to whom do we owe it that we were not born of heathen, or Mahometan, or Popish parents? To whom is it owing, that our lot is cast in this happy land of light and liberty? Can we trace these mercies to any thing but the sovereign grace, and the electing love, of God? And may I not go further still, and say, that you, my dear brethren, are favoured with a ministration of the Gospel as clear and as faithful as any around you? I trust I may, without vanity and without boasting, call God to record, that I have "never kept back any thing which I conceived to be profitable for you²."

¹ Compare Matt. xxvi. 7—9. with John xii. 3—6.

² Acts xx. 20.

Then, in these respects, I may say of all of you, that God has chosen you : and, inasmuch as you are all equally partakers of these mercies, you may account yourselves equally the children of God ; yea, and so far as your outward conduct is correct, you may be accounted so by others.]

But, after all, God *may* see, and most probably *does* see, an immense difference between you—

[Only see what one reigning lust *proved and demonstrated* in Judas Iscariot : it *proved* him, in despite of all his specious appearances, to be “a devil.” My dear brethren, the same evidence will demonstrate the same awful truth, wherever it be found. Nor does it matter what that reigning lust is : it may be covetousness, or lewdness, or pride, or vindictiveness, or any other sin ; but, whatever it may be, whether dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand, it will decide our character, and determine our doom : if it continue unmortified and unsubdued, it will infallibly consign us over to the fire of hell¹. If one besetting sin marked Judas as “a son of perdition^m,” and transmitted him to that everlasting dread abode, so will it us, whose place it must be,” as well as hisⁿ. Our being of the seed of Abraham will not make us “God’s children,” any more than it made him^o. Our saying, Lord, Lord, however confidently we may repeat it, will not procure us a place in heaven^p; nor if we have “wrought miracles and cast out devils in the Saviour’s name,” will it prevail to avert from us our merited condemnation^q. Perish we must, if sin of any kind be harboured in our hearts^r. It is not necessary that we be perfect, in order to obtain mercy of the Lord in that day : for then who could ever be saved? The Apostles themselves were not perfect : but in *purpose* and *endeavour* we must be perfect : and they only will find acceptance before God, who are “Israelites indeed, and without guile^s.” I say again, in *aim* and *effort* we must be perfect : “for he is not a Jew who is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew who is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God^t.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Rest not then, brethren, in outward privileges—

[Be it so : you may have all the privileges that Paul himself possessed when in his unconverted state : yet would they not profit you, if you were not brought to the knowledge of

¹ Mark ix. 43—48.

^o Rom. ix. 7, 8

^r Ps. lxvi. 18.

^m John xvii. 12.

^p Matt. vii. 21.

^s John i. 47.

ⁿ Acts i. 25.

^q Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^t Rom. ii. 28, 29.

Christ Jesus^a, and to a real conformity to his image^x. Who can think of one of our Lord's chosen Apostles perishing in his sins, and not tremble for himself, lest his very mercies, instead of rescuing him from eternal misery, should only aggravate and increase it?

Beware, then, lest, having been exalted to heaven, like Capernaum, in your privileges, you be cast down to hell for your abuse of them; and lest, having remained impenitent under blessings which Tyre and Sidon would have improved, your final condemnation become at last proportionably heavier than theirs^y.]

2. Examine yourselves as to your inward dispositions—

[God sees the heart: and by the dispositions of the heart will he judge us in the last day. Now, suppose that our blessed Lord, who in his tender mercy has chosen this whole assembly to enjoy all the means of salvation, should, on inspecting our hearts, pronounce that there was, in the midst of us, one who, notwithstanding all his fair pretences and specious appearances, was a devil; and suppose that unhappy being were pointed out to us; with what pity should we look upon him, and how compassionately should we weep over him! And can we venture to hope, that in such an assembly there is not *one* who is under the dominion of some secret lust? If in such a family as our blessed Lord's, where they had such rich instructions, such a bright example, and such motives to serve their God aright, there was, even amongst the small number of twelve, one that was a devil; is there not reason rather to fear, that, instead of one only being found in the midst of this whole assembly, there *may be* as many in proportion as amongst our Lord's Apostles; namely, one in every twelve? O! what a fearful thought is this! And is this an uncharitable thought? Are we all so like to the holy Apostles, that one in twelve may not be supposed to differ from them, if not in outward conduct, yet in the integrity of his heart, and in the entire devotion of his life? And what if, after all, this proportion should be inverted, and not above one in twelve be found truly dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness, as the holy Apostles were, and ready to lay down their lives for the Lord Jesus; would not this come nearer to the truth? Alas! alas! I would not be uncharitable: but when I compare the mind, the spirit, the entire conduct of you all, with that of the Apostles, I cannot dissemble my fears respecting the testimony which the Lord Jesus, the Judge of quick and

^a Phil. iii. 4—9.

^x Phil. iii. 10, 11. and 1 Cor. xiii. 1—8.

^y Matt. xi. 20—24.

dead, shall bear respecting you at the last day. Judge then yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord. Judge whether there be not some price for which ye have already sold your Saviour, and for which ye are betraying him to an ungodly world. I must tell you, that if there be any thing, even life itself, which ye are not ready to part with for his sake, *that* is the price for which ye have sold him; and that, though ye may continue to deceive both yourselves and others, the hour is coming when your true character will be declared, and your proper doom awarded to you*. May God, in his infinite mercy, impress this awful subject on all your minds, and lead every one of you to look for this unhappy character, (supposing there to be one amongst you,) not to your neighbour, but to yourselves; and to inquire, every one for himself, "Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?" that so at last the number of this unhappy people may be diminished; and if it were possible, that not one of you should remain, who shall not at last have an approving testimony from the heart-searching God! Amen, and Amen.]

* Matt. x. 39.

MDCXLVI.

CONNEXION BETWEEN PIETY AND KNOWLEDGE.

John vii. 17. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

THE very enemies of our Lord were constrained to say, "Never man spake like this man." Yet did many of them persist in representing him as a deceiver: and, because he had not been educated after the manner of the Scribes and Pharisees, they considered him as incapable of instructing them*. But to what was it owing that they could not receive his word? Was there any thing in his mode of conveying his instructions, which involved them in unnecessary obscurity? The parabolic form in which he taught the people was common in his day; and, if it cast somewhat of a veil over his instructions, it tended to remove the offence which too explicit a statement would occasion, and to convey knowledge to persons precisely in such a measure as they were

* ver. 12, 15.

able to receive it. The real obstacle which his discourses met with arose from the inveterate prejudices with which the minds of his hearers were prepossessed. Hence they rejected his word, and denied that he was divinely authorized to promulgate the doctrines he maintained. To remove this obstacle, he told them what it was which they wanted, and what alone it was which would render his word profitable to their souls. They wanted an integrity of mind, to obey the truth, as far as it should be revealed to them: and therefore he said, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

These words will naturally lead me to shew,

I. The disposition of mind necessary for a profitable investigation of the Holy Scriptures—

Truth, which is merely practical, requires little besides a strong intellectual power to be exercised upon it; but divine truth is intimately connected with the dispositions of the mind, and requires,

1. A desire to know God's will—

[We should bear in mind, that there is a superior Being, to whom we are all accountable for our actions. This may be known even from the works of creation: and the knowledge of it should make us anxious to be informed what His will is, and how we may find acceptance with him. When, therefore, a book is put into our hands, purporting to come from him, we should read it, not with mere transient curiosity, nor as a book whereon to exercise our critical skill, but with a real desire to know all that he shall have seen fit to reveal, especially respecting the duties which we owe him, and the way that he has appointed for the conciliating of his favour — — — The state of our minds should be precisely like that of Cornelius and his family, when Peter was sent as a divine messenger to instruct them: "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God^b."]]

2. A readiness to do it—

[We must not sit in judgment on God's word, complaining of this as too strict, and that as too difficult and self-denying. The only point for us to ascertain is, whether it be the word

^b Acts x. 33.

of God or not: and, if we are convinced that it is his word, then must we receive it with the most child-like simplicity, and obey it without either hesitation or reserve. Nothing is to appear to us "an hard saying." If it be beyond our comprehension, we should be content to say, in relation to it, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." If we see not exactly the reason of God's commands, we are not therefore to decline obeying them: for, if an earthly parent expects obedience, though the reasons of his commands be hidden from his child, much more may God expect at our hands a ready acquiescence in all that he commands, even when the reasons of his injunctions are far out of sight — — — St. Paul's prayer, at the time of his conversion, should be ours at all times: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"]

To recommend to you this disposition in perusing the Holy Scriptures, I will proceed to mark,

II. Its conduciveness to a clear understanding of them—

It will most materially aid us,

1. In a discovery of its origin—

[When this holy disposition is wanting, almost every truth of Scripture will prove a stumbling-block to us: but when it regulates our researches, we shall find all the deepest and most offensive declarations of God's word to accord with our real state before him. Does he declare that "the carnal mind is enmity against him?" We shall be ready, from our own actual experience, to admit it: for we shall be constrained to confess, that, whatever others may have been, we have had no delight in him, or in any thing that could lead us to him. When he asserts that there can be no salvation for us but through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall see how exactly that agrees with our own necessities at least; since we are wholly devoid of any righteousness of our own, and incapable of working out a righteousness wherein we can stand before him. When he requires an entire devotedness of heart and life to his service, our own feelings attest that such a surrender of ourselves to him is the duty and happiness of all his creatures. In fact, the whole revelation of God will then appear to us both worthy of God and suited to man: and, though other evidences of the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures have doubtless their weight and importance, and indeed are absolutely necessary for the conviction of others, this will prove the most satisfactory of all to a man's own mind. The very excellency of the truths of Scripture will mark, to his perfect

* Acts ix. 6.

satisfaction, their divine origin : for none but God could have conceived things so remote from human apprehension, yet so glorious in themselves, and so harmonious in all their parts ; harmonious with the perfections of the Deity, and with the necessities of fallen man.]

2. In an apprehension of its import—

[In “an honest and good heart,” such as alone is fit for the reception of the heavenly seed, there is such a correspondence with divine truth as makes the reception of it easy. To such an one sin appears hateful, and therefore he acquiesces at once in all that is said in condemnation of it : and holiness appears delightful, and therefore he feels no inclination to lower the requirements of the Gospel. He would gladly, if he could, “be holy as God is holy,” and “perfect as God is perfect.” Hence the things which are stumbling-blocks and rocks of offence to a carnal mind, are most acceptable to him, inasmuch as they accord with the convictions of his own mind, and with the desires of his own soul. In a word, the whole plan of salvation, in all its parts and in all its bearings, is such as fills him with delight. He would not but be humbled in the dust : he would not wish to rob Almighty God of his glory in any one particular : “Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name, be the praise!” is the very language of his soul : and all that is spoken in Scripture respecting God’s free and sovereign disposals of his grace and mercy, so far from being offensive to him, finds a complete counterpart in the dispositions of his mind : and he is then most pleased, when God is most glorified.]

Hence, then, we may see,

1. Whence it is that the word of God produces so little effect in the world—

[It is not regarded as the word of God. Men sit in judgment upon it ; and, instead of taking it with meek submission as a rule of their faith and practice, satisfy themselves with making it a theatre for the display of their own ingenuity and learning. At best, the generality of men give but a feigned assent to it as the inspired volume : they will, perhaps, even contend for it *as a whole*, and yet dispute against it in relation to all its most important parts. Thus men contrive to evade its force : but when it comes fully upon the heart and conscience, “it is like fire, or like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.” Let it once reach the heart of man, and it will prove “sharper than any two-edged sword,” and “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”]

^d Heb. iv. 12.

^e 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

2. How we may derive from it all the benefit it is destined to impart—

[We must receive it as the word of the living God, the word of God to *us*. We must yield ourselves “with meekness” altogether to its influence^f. What is there that it will not then do for us? Verily, “it will do good to him that walketh uprightly^g.” Yes, all kinds of good: it will quicken, comfort, support, sanctify, and save the soul. Let your souls, then, be turned as the wax to the seal, or as the melted ore to the mould^h. Then, through the teachings of the Holy Spirit, shall it perform its whole work upon you, and transform you “into the divine image in righteousness, and true holiness.”]

^f Jam. i. 21. ^g Mic. ii. 7. ^h Rom. vi. 17. See the Greek.

MDCXLVII.

CHRIST MAY BE SOUGHT TOO LATE.

John vii. 36. *What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?*

FROM the character of our blessed Lord we might well expect, that, in whatever circumstances he should be placed, his words and actions would be such as became an incarnate God. Accordingly we find that he was never discomposed, never disheartened; but that, as well in the prospect of a cruel death as on all other occasions, he preserved a temper unruffled, a patience unsubdued. “The Pharisees had sent officers to take him;” and though the precise hour for his being delivered up into their hands was not yet arrived, it was very near: yet, instead of manifesting the smallest apprehension of his approaching sufferings, he spake of his death as though he had been going a journey; and shewed, that his chief concern was about the judgments that would fall upon his enemies: “Yet a little while am I with you; and then I go unto Him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, but shall not find me; and where I go, thither ye cannot come.” This assertion of his appeared quite inexplicable to them. “They said among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall

not find him?" and then, after some unsatisfactory conjectures about his going to preach among the Gentiles, or destroying his own life, they were constrained to acknowledge, that they could not at all comprehend it; "What manner of saying is this that he said?" Indeed, even his own Disciples were as much at a loss about his meaning as his very enemies^a.

It is not our intention to justify their unbelief: for it is evident that they were actuated by a proud captious spirit, and not by a sincere desire after instruction. Yet their words will afford us a fit occasion to shew,

I. The importance of inquiring into Divine truth in general—

It is certain that there are many expressions in the Scriptures dark and intricate—

[This arises in part from the mysterious nature of Divine truth, which relates to subjects remote from the apprehensions of fallen man — — — It is owing also in part to the metaphorical language in which the doctrines of Revelation are often expressed; for, however certain figures may serve to illustrate the particular doctrine contained in them, they cast a veil over the doctrine, till the truth contained in them is understood — — — But most of all, it is owing to the disinclination of man to receive the things which are revealed. The mind of fallen man is blinded by pride, and passion, and interest: it has a corrupt bias: it is averse to the things which the Spirit of God requires and reveals: "it hates the light, and will not come to the light, lest its vile propensities should be reproved:" and therefore it accounts "the things of the Spirit foolishness," because it is not able to discern their excellency.]

Nevertheless the things contained in the Scriptures are of infinite importance to us all—

[They relate to the everlasting salvation of the soul: they declare the only way in which a sinner can find acceptance with God: they set forth the person, work, and offices of the Messiah, together with the distinct offices of the Holy Trinity in the work of redemption. They make known the characters of them that are saved and of them that perish, together with the states to which both the one and the other will be sentenced. In short, "the word that Christ hath spoken to us, the same shall judge us in the last day." Now in comparison

^a Compare ver. 35. and viii. 22. with xvi. 16—18.

of these things, the concerns of time and sense are lighter than the dust upon the balance. Earthly things indeed appear of greater magnitude, because they are nearer to us: but if spiritual truths are brought nigh by faith, they eclipse every other object, as the meridian sun hides by its splendour the feebler radiance of the stars.]

They should therefore be inquired into with all diligence—

[We should not be satisfied with a general acknowledgment of their truth, but should examine into the precise import of them, with a view to ascertain what is the state of our own souls before God. When we hear our Lord affirm so solemnly and so repeatedly, that “unless we be born again we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;” should we not pause, and consider, and inquire what is meant by the *new birth*, and whether we have ever experienced the change implied in it? When we read, that “except we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, there is no life in us,” should we not use all possible means to understand it, and to learn whether we are in a state of life or of death? Can we suppose, that, because these assertions are conveyed under metaphorical expressions, they mean nothing; or, that we have no concern with them? Will our ignorance of their import make them void? or will our contempt of them prevent the execution of the Divine judgments agreeably to them? We ought, then, as our Lord enjoins us, to “search the Scriptures,” to weigh every expression contained in them, and to seek a conformity to them in the whole of our principles and conduct.]

But not to dwell any longer on general truths, let us consider,

II. The importance of ascertaining the meaning of “this saying” in particular—

Scarcely any expression so frequently occurs towards the close of our Saviour’s ministry as this; from whence we may be assured, that it deserved the special attention of his followers. Let us then examine its meaning,

1. In reference to *them*—

[Our Lord was speedily to be put to death. His death indeed was voluntary on his part; “No man could take his life from him, but he laid it down of himself:” and therefore he said, “I go to Him that sent me.” But on their part, it was the effect of murderous rage: for this their iniquity the

whole nation were to be abandoned to utter ruin^b. "Then," says our Lord, "ye will seek me, and shall not find me." He does not mean, that they would cry to *him*, and humble themselves before him; but that they would seek for their Messiah, and long for him to deliver them: and the fact was, that, when those calamities did come upon them, they were so desirous of the Messiah's advent, as willingly to receive any impostor that chose to assume that character. But they had slain the true Messiah, and would look for any other in vain^c.

Besides, the great mass of individuals among them were to be given over to final impenitence; and, when they should come before Christ at the last day, they would desire to find mercy with him: but, as "Esau, having sold his birth-right, desired afterwards to inherit the blessing, and was rejected, and could find no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears^d," so these wicked men would repent too late, and spend eternity in unavailing sorrows.

Whilst our Lord warned them of their impending danger, he taught them to consider their punishment as necessarily connected with their wickedness: "Where I am, thither ye *cannot* come." He does not say, "ye *shall* not;" but, ye "*cannot*" come: for they would be excluded from heaven no less by their utter incapacity to enjoy it, than by the unalterable decree of God. Heaven, if they were admitted to it, would be no heaven to them, whilst they retained their malignant passions, and rejected the salvation offered them in the Gospel.]

2. In inference to ourselves—

[Jesus is yet present with us by the preaching of the Gospel; and he will be withdrawn from us as soon as ever death shall separate us from the means of grace. When "the door of heaven shall be shut, we may stand without, and knock, saying, Lord, open to us:" we may even plead with him, and say, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets:" but it will be too late: he will say to us, "Depart from me, I never knew you:" ye sought me not, nor believed in me, when ye were yet on mercy's ground; and now you must have "judgment without mercy."

But this may be the case whilst yet we are in this lower world. There is an "accepted time, a day of salvation," which we may irretrievably lose. We may "grieve" and "resist the Holy Spirit," till we "quench" his gracious motions, and provoke God to say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone." He may be so offended by our wickedness as to "give us up to a reprobate mind," and to "swear in his wrath that we shall

^b Luke xix. 42—44. ^c Luke xvii. 22. ^d Heb. xii. 16, 17.

never enter into his rest." He has warned us, that he will do so; that "if we refuse when he calls, he will laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh: that we may even seek him early, and shall not find him; because we hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord^e."

Indeed, as long as we continue in an unconverted state, that word is true, "Where I am, thither ye cannot come:" for it is impossible for any one to enjoy heaven, without having attained a meetness for it; or to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven, without that wedding garment in which every acceptable guest is clothed.]

We may see then *What manner of saying this is—*

1. It is an *instructive* saying—

[Many are the valuable lessons which it inculcates. It teaches us, that on the present moment eternity depends — — — That our great concern in life is to obtain the knowledge of Christ, and an interest in his favour — — — That a wilful abuse of our present privileges may provoke God to give us up to final impenitence — — — and that, if we die before we are "renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness," we can no more enjoy heaven, than "light can have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial" — — — Would to God that we might learn these things so deeply, as to be continually influenced by them! Happy will it be for us, if we "seek the Lord while he *may* be found, and call upon him while he is near."]

2. It is a *comfortable* saying—

[The words of our text are elsewhere addressed to his own more-favoured Disciples^f. They are, in fact, like the pillar and cloud by which Israel were conducted out of Egypt: they have a luminous aspect towards the people of God, whilst they present a dark side towards his enemies. His own dearest children cannot follow him *now*; but they *shall* follow him *soon*^g. He is merely "gone to prepare a place for them; and will come soon to take them to himself, that *where he is they may be also*^h." Moreover, his separation from them at present is only corporeal: for he is still with them, and "they see him," and enjoy the sweetest "fellowship with himⁱ:" and in a little time they shall enter into his immediate presence, and "be for ever with the Lord^k." Well might the Apostle say, "*Comfort ye one another with these words.*"

But this saying is peculiarly comfortable in another view;

^e Prov. i. 24—29. with 2 Cor. vi. 2. and Rom. i. 28.

^f John xiii. 33.

^g John xiii. 36.

^h John xiv. 2, 3.

ⁱ John xiv. 19—22 with 1 John i. 3.

^k 1 Thess iv. 17, 18.

for what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews, the Christian may say respecting all his spiritual enemies: '*Yet a little while I am with you; and ye may make your assaults upon me: but soon I shall go to my Father, and be out of your reach: then ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, thither ye cannot come.* No, Satan, thou canst no more molest me there: temptation shall harass me no more; sin shall no more defile me; sorrow shall no more cloud my mind or oppress my spirits: *there shall enter nothing that defileth*: I may be exposed to you all a little while longer; but soon I shall embrace uninterrupted *joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*' Blessed reflection! Who must not long for death, that he may enjoy such happiness as this? Who must not add his Amen to that petition of our Lord, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me?" Yes; let all our hearts say, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"

3. It is a *terrific* saying—

[Whilst we see so many living at their ease disregarding all the invitations of the Gospel, and dreaming of happiness without an interest in Christ, how distressing is it to think, that in a little time their day of grace will be passed, and that God may either give them up to judicial blindness, or say, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee!" When we tell them of these things, they are ready to reply, "*What manner of saying is this that he hath said?*" It is a wild enthusiastic dream that shall never be realized." Ah! would to God it might not be realized! but it will, in spite of all that you can say, or do, to the contrary. If you continue saying to Christ, "*Depart from us*;" we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" he will soon take you at your word, and say, "*Depart from me*, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Trifle then no more with the opportunities afforded you; but "redeem the time;" and, "whilst the light is yet with you, walk in the light, lest darkness come upon you!" and "an impassable gulf be fixed" between you and our ever-adorable Emmanuel.]

¹ John xii. 35, 36.

MDCXLVIII.

CHRIST'S OFFER OF THE SPIRIT.

John vii. 37, 38. *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

OUR blessed Lord incessantly laboured for the salvation of men; nor could their ungrateful returns at all divert him from his purpose. His life was sought, and he knew that persons were sent to apprehend him: yet, instead of rejecting them with abhorrence, he sought to win them by love, and importuned them to accept his richest blessings. Let us consider his invitation,

I. As addressed to them—

The time and manner of his invitation are worthy of notice—

[This was a day of peculiar sanctity, and of uncommon festivity^a; and it seems that some customs, not required in the original institutions of the law, obtained among the Jews at that time^b. Happy to improve the opportunity, Jesus stood in the most conspicuous place, and, with an exalted voice, claimed the attention of the people; and, despising equally the censures of the uncharitable, and the persecutions of the proud, he made them fresh overtures of mercy. While *they* only panted for his blood, *he* longed for their salvation. He pointed himself out to them as “the only fountain of living

^a It was the eighth and last day of the feast of tabernacles, Lev. xxiii. 34, 36.

^b It is said that on this day they went annually to the pool of Siloam, and drawing water from thence returned with it in procession to the temple, where they poured it out with all possible demonstrations of joy. At what time this custom arose, it is not easy to determine; but probably it commenced after the Babylonish captivity; and was adopted in reference to that prediction, Isai. xii. 3. Nor is the design of it precisely known: but it seems most likely that they then commemorated the giving of water out of the rock in the wilderness; and called upon God for rain, which was so necessary to them at that season. Perhaps the more spiritual among them, might pray also for those spiritual blessings, which their promised Messiah was appointed to bestow. These circumstances served as the foundation of our Lord's address, and reflect much light upon it.

waters," and assured them of his readiness to impart whatsoever they stood in need of. He excepted none from his offers, provided they did but "thirst" for his blessings.]

Lest, however, his invitation should be slighted, he enforced it with a promise—

[He first explained what he meant by "coming to him." (It was not a mere outward, but an inward and spiritual application, that he wished them to make to him.) They were to "believe in *him*," as possessing all fulness in himself^c: and as the person appointed of the Father to convey blessings to them^d. In a full persuasion of this truth they were to come to him by faith. For their encouragement he promised them a rich effusion of his Spirit. By "living water" our Lord meant the gift of his Spirit^e; and when he said, that "rivers of this living water should flow out of his belly," he intimated, that the believer should have a constant spring of consolation within him, which should refresh all who came within the sphere of his influence. Of this blessed truth the Scriptures had abundantly testified, and our Lord now confirmed it to them by a most solemn promise. He assured them, as he had before told the Samaritan woman, that his communications to them should prove a source of unutterable and endless joy^f.]

In this promise he clearly shewed them that he was the promised Messiah—

[*The gift of his Spirit* in such an abundant measure was that "*new thing*" which the Messiah was to accomplish^g — — — And in thus freely offering it to all, he fulfilled the office more especially assigned him^h — — —]

But it is time that we consider the invitation,

II. As addressed to us—

In the very name of Christ, and as his authorized ambassador, I now repeat the invitation to you: "I stand and cry to *you*," even as *he* did to *them*, and with the very same confidence and assurance.

[Christ is "the fountain of living watersⁱ:" it has pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell^k; and that all

^c Col. i. 19.

^d Ps. lxxii. 17.

^e ver. 39. Some, because our Lord's words are not found in Scripture, connect καθὼς εἶπεν ἡ γραφή with ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ; (translating εἶπεν, hath required) but there are many passages that speak to the same effect, though not in his express terms.

^f John iv. 10, 13, 14.

^g Isai. xliii. 18—20. and xlv. 3.

^h Isai. lv. 1—3. and Joel ii. 28, 29, 32.

ⁱ Jer. ii. 13.

^k Col. i. 19.

we should receive out of it according to our necessities¹. In fact, he has received the Holy Spirit on purpose that he may impart it unto us^m. And now I say in the presence of you all, that if you will but "believe in him you shall receive this heavenly gift in the richest abundance." Whatever you may have been, or whatever you may have done, even though, like his auditors, you may have thirsted for his blood, the offer is to you. If only you thirst for salvation, you shall never be disappointed of your hope: "The Holy Spirit shall be in you as a well of water springing up unto eternal life." It shall accomplish in you all the good pleasure of your God, and *shall enable you to diffuse blessings all around you*. In truth, *this* is your distinctive privilege. A man may possess ever so large a measure of earthly wisdom or power, and never be able to benefit or comfort one soul: but if you be endued with the Holy Ghost, your conversation shall be edifying to all around you; and you shall be the means of imparting to others in rich abundance the consolation and refreshment which you yourself have received. If Christ be as the rock in the wilderness to you, you in your measure shall be the same to many a thirsting soul.]

Let me then invite you all, as it were, separately and by name—

[You who, like our Saviour's auditors, *have no desire after spiritual blessings*, what have you ever found that can be compared with the blessings here offered you? What have all those things for which you have laboured proved, but "broken cisterns that can hold no water?" And do you think you contract no guilt whilst you prefer such vanities before the living God? Hear how God himself complains of youⁿ — — — And assure yourselves, that, if you continue to treat him thus, the day will come when you will "want a drop of water to cool your tongue."

If there be any *who doubt whether they shall ever obtain such mercy at their Saviour's hands*, "only believe, and according to your faith it shall be done unto you." See how exactly the Lord has stated your very case, and accommodated to your mind his gracious promises^o — — — Dismiss your fears then, and wait patiently upon him in prayer; and in due season the Rock shall be stricken to quench your thirst; and "your soul shall ere long be as a watered garden, and as a spring of water, whose waters fail not^p."

But doubtless there are some who *have already drunk of the living waters* which Christ has given them. It is no wonder

¹ John i. 16. Phil. iv. 19. ^m Ps. lxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8.

ⁿ Jer. ii. 12, 13.

^o Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^p Isai. lviii. 11.

that *you* thirst: for if you had received as much as ever St. Paul himself had, you would only thirst the more, "forgetting what you had received, and panting still for more." But remember this; if you have ever drunk of these waters, "you will never thirst for any thing else" even to your dying hour^a. Even though you have no earthly comfort whatever, you will be "as one that possesses all things^r." Remember too, that you must daily make your profiting to appear. Being watered as the garden of the Lord, you must "abound in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." Remember lastly, that you are to impart to others the blessings which you yourselves have received. From you are to flow rivers of living water for the refreshing of others; and "as you have received freely, you must freely give" to all around you. As "the righteous are a tree of life^s," that all may eat of their life-giving fruits, so are you to be wells of salvation in your respective spheres, that all who can gain access to you may have the cup of salvation put into their hands, and drink and live for ever. Such is the honour which our blessed Saviour has conferred on you; and such is the improvement of it which he expects at your hands.]

^a John iv. 14

^r 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^s Prov. xi. 30.

MDCXLIX.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY DISMISSED.

John viii. 10, 11. *When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.*

IT is surprising to see in what a variety of ways the wickedness of the human heart will betray itself: sometimes in the commission of gross iniquity, and sometimes in apparent indignation against it: sometimes in open hostility against Christ, and sometimes in hypocritical professions of regard for him. Who that had seen the zeal of the Scribes and Pharisees against an adulterous woman, would not have thought them the purest of the human race? Who that had heard their citations of Moses' law, and their respectful application to Christ as an authorized expositor of that law, would not have supposed that they truly feared God, and desired to perform his holy will?

Who would have imagined that the whole was only a murderous plot against the life of Christ? Yet so it was. These accusers had no indignation against the sin of adultery, nor any love to the law of Moses, nor any zeal for the honour of God: they were actuated solely by an inveterate hatred of Christ, and a determination to find, if possible, some occasion against him, that they might accuse him. Their professed object was, to punish the woman; but their real object was, to lay a snare for his life.

We forbear to notice, that in some old manuscript copies this short history is not recorded, because there can be no doubt of its authenticity; and the very care with which the early Christians examined the authenticity of every part of Scripture, is a strong proof of the genuineness of the New Testament, as it has been handed down to us.

That which we wish you particularly to observe, is,

I. In what manner Christ *extricated himself*—

The snare laid for him was well contrived—

[The Scribes and Pharisees brought him a woman, who had been taken in the very act of adultery, and was therefore incapable of uttering a word in her own defence. The law of Moses had prescribed that all who were guilty of that crime should be put to death. If the woman were not absolutely married, but only espoused, she was still to be put to death, and that by stoning^a. Hence, it should seem, the particular death to which adulterers in general were condemned, was that of stoning^b. But the point which they referred to our Lord's decision, was, whether they should execute the law, or not. Now there were but four things which our Lord could do: either he might acquit the woman, or condemn her, or dismiss the matter without any attention to it, or refer them to another tribunal; but whichever of these he should do, they would make it a ground of accusation against him: if he should acquit her, they would represent him as an enemy to Moses, and a patron of iniquity: if he should condemn her, they would accuse him to the Romans as resisting the government of Cæsar, and encouraging sedition: if he should dismiss the matter, they would say he shewed no zeal for the honour of God, whom he pretended to call his Father, and had no pretensions to the office of the Messiah, whose first object would

^a Lev. xx. 10. Deut. xxii. 22—24.

^b Ezek. xvi. 38, 40.

be to "make an end of sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." If he should refer them to any other tribunal, to whomsoever he referred them, whether to the Roman or Jewish authorities, they would equally find matter of accusation against him; either of sanctioning the usurpation of the Romans on the one hand, or of setting himself against it, on the other: so that, whatsoever he should say or do, they would lower him in the estimation of the people, and open a way for his destruction.]

And how did he escape the snare—

[At first he declined giving any answer at all; but stooped down, and wrote upon the ground. What he wrote, we know not: nor are we told precisely what he meant by that significant action^c: but his enemies, conceiving that they had gained their point, became more and more urgent for a decisive answer: he therefore addressed himself to their consciences; and as, in the case of idolatry, the law required that the witnesses should be the first in stoning the offender to death, so he bade the person that was without sin among them begin to inflict the punishment of death upon her. He did not by this intend, that under the Gospel dispensation human laws should not be executed by any who were not themselves without sin; but he determined to confound these vile hypocrites, who, under a mask of zeal against sin, were perpetrating the greatest of all sins. To give time for his word to operate on their consciences, he stooped down and wrote again: and behold, these accusers, self-condemned in their own minds, and fearful lest their own secret abominations should be exposed to public view, withdrew as privately as they could; the elder part among them, as being most fearful of exposure, retiring first, and gradually the younger also following their example; so that in a little time not a single accuser was left. What an evidence was here of the power of conscience, when awakened by the Spirit of God, and armed against the sinner by a Divine power! Truly, the blindest must see, the most obdurate must feel, the most impudent must blush, and the most confident be confounded, when once the voice of conscience is distinctly heard: and we cannot but think it a good way of silencing a contentious and subtle adversary, to make a direct attack upon his conscience, and to fix his attention upon what has passed within his own bosom.

^c The words "as though he heard them not," are printed in italics to shew that they are not in the original: and certainly they had better not have been inserted; because it was manifest that he did hear them. But by this action he might intend to intimate, that they should take heed to what was written: or perhaps he wrote the very sentence which he afterwards pronounced.

It is not necessary to suppose that all the accusers had been guilty of the precise sin which they laid to the charge of this woman: there was now enough of their past iniquities presented to their view to produce the desired effect, of constraining them to proclaim their own shame, and to suspend the persecution which they had so wickedly commenced. Thus was our Lord relieved from every difficulty; and his enemies "fell into the pit which they had digged" for him.]

It remains for us now to notice,

II. In what manner he *dismissed the woman*—

We hear of no triumph that he expressed over his disconcerted adversaries: he merely asks where they were; and finding that they had withdrawn, and no longer chose to appear in the quality of accusers, he dismisses the woman,

1. With condescending kindness—

["Woman, hath no man condemned thee? neither do I condemn thee: go thy way." It is not my office to exercise the power of the civil magistrate; nor is it my wish to denounce the judgments of God against thee. "I came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through me might be saved^d." Go, improve the time that is now unexpectedly allotted thee: be thankful that thou art not now sent into the presence of thy God with all thy sins upon thee: let the "space which is given thee for repentance," be well employed: lose not an hour in seeking forgiveness with thy God. Go to thy chamber, and pour out thy soul before him: and remember, that the mercy which thou art experiencing at my hands in relation to thy body, is an emblem of what I am ready to bestow upon thy soul. "I came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost:" nor shall the vilest of the human race be condemned before me in the great and awful day, provided he penitently confess his sins, and humbly seek acceptance through me: "Though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^e."]]

2. With an authoritative admonition—

[Greatly as our Lord delighted in mercy, he would not so exercise it as to give the least countenance to sin. Whilst therefore he dismisses her, he adds a solemn admonition, "Go, and sin no more." Think not lightly of thy sins, because I have expressed such tenderness towards thee; neither imagine that they will not be punished hereafter, if thou

^d John iii. 17.

^e Isai. i. 18. and Prov. xxviii. 13.

continuest in the commission of them. The "goodness and long-suffering and forbearance which thou hast experienced, should lead thee to repentance:" and, if they do not, they will aggravate thy condemnation to all eternity. Go therefore, and sin no more. Let a sense of thy past dangers deter thee: let a consideration of the mercies vouchsafed to thee stimulate thine exertions: let the hope of future mercies encourage thee: let the prospect of a future judgment fix thy purpose, and strengthen thy resolution. Above all, commit thyself to God, who alone is "able to keep thee from falling, and to present thee faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."]

ADDRESS—

1. The self-satisfied and self-applauding Christian—

[Many who are vehement against flagrant transgressors, and many too who profess an outward reverence for Christ, are yet exceeding vile in the sight of the heart-searching God. Before men, perhaps, they appear in a favourable light: but if all that they have thought and done in secret were written on their foreheads, they could not endure the sight of their fellow-creatures, but would retire from society, as these Scribes and Pharisees retired, filled with shame and confusion. Let each one of us examine the records of his own conscience; and recollect all the transactions which have passed from his youth up to the present hour: ah! who amongst us would venture, after such a survey, to justify himself? Know ye, brethren, that God sees all that has passed, whether ye see it or not: you may have forgotten it; but it is all recorded in the book of his remembrance, and will be exposed by him to the view of the whole assembled universe. Learn then to view yourselves as he views you; and to esteem yourselves as he esteems you: and know, that you never have a just estimate of your own character till you see yourselves to be the chief of sinners. Cast away, I say, your high thoughts of yourselves, and learn to lothe and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes.]

2. The sorrowful and self-condemning Christian—

[You see in the history before us how tender and compassionate the Saviour is. If then conscience have arrested you, and brought you into his presence, remember, that he is rich in mercy, and ready to forgive; and that he will never condemn any but the impenitent and unbelieving^f — — —

At the same time, I would affectionately caution you against

^f Isai. lv. 7. 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

mistaking the nature of true repentance. Perhaps conscience has condemned you, and you have felt ashamed and confounded on account of your great iniquities. But if you have gone no further, you are no true penitent. The Scribes and Pharisees advanced thus far; but they sought not mercy at the Saviour's hands: *they went from him*, fearing more the decrease of their reputation, than the loss of their souls. Had they been truly penitent, they would have blessed him who had thus flashed conviction on their minds, and have implored his more effectual power to change and renew their souls. Be not contented then to resemble them; but seek to know all the hidden abominations of your hearts, and to have them washed away in the Redeemer's blood. Be assured that true repentance will lead you to Christ: and, if you do not find this effect from your convictions, you may know infallibly that your sorrow is not of "a godly sort," and that your very repentance needs yet to be repented of.

It is of great importance for you to make these distinctions; because many continue all their days guilty, but not humbled; condemned, but not forgiven.]

3. The Christian who professes to have obtained mercy of the Lord—

[The admonition given to the woman is equally addressed to every true believer. And here must I suggest a caution against a common, but fatal error. If persons abstain from some particular sins which they have before committed, they are ready to think that they have done all that is required of them. But to turn from gross iniquities is a small matter; and to perform some particular duties is a small matter. Pride and self-complacency may carry us thus far: but the grace of God must carry us much farther. We must lay the axe to the root: we must put away "our besetting sin:" and must become "new creatures," and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds." Mark this expression: it conveys a more complete idea of sound conversion than almost any other expression in the whole sacred volume: contemplate it: enter into it: beg of God to reveal to you its true import. The bent of your minds was earthly: a directly opposite bent must now be given it; just as a river which recently flowed with rapidity towards the ocean, now flows with equal rapidity towards the fountain-head: the tide has turned, and completely changed its course. Thus must it be with you: heavenly things must now have the place in your affections that earthly things once held; and the delight of your soul must be in them, as that of a licentious man is in his pleasures, or an avaricious man in his wealth. To surrender up all your faculties and powers as a living sacrifice to God, is the proper fruit of his mercies, and the proper evidence

of his grace. Never think then that you have yet attained, but press forward for higher degrees of grace and holiness; and make it your endeavour to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

MDCL.

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

John viii. 12. Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

IT was customary with our blessed Lord to take occasion from things that were immediately before him to instil divine knowledge into his hearers. When he was at a well, he spake of himself as a fountain of living water: when mention had been made of the manna which was given to the Israelites in the wilderness, he represented himself as the bread that came down from heaven, that men might eat of it and live for ever: when he was passing through a vineyard, he set himself forth as the true and living vine, by an union with which all the branches were to bring forth fruit. Thus, it should seem, in the passage before us, being early in the temple*, and beholding the sun shining bright upon him, he resumed his discourse which had been interrupted, and spake to all the people, saying, "I am the light of the world."

We cannot but notice in this impressive declaration,
I. The excellency of Christ—

Of all the objects in the visible creation, the sun is the most splendid and majestic: and hence it is the most frequently selected to characterize our blessed Lord. The sun has in itself a fulness of light, and is the one source of light to the material world. In Christ also are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" and from him alone is derived all spiritual light. It is he that enlightens all,

* ver. 2.

1. By his instructions—

[To form a correct judgment of this subject, we should survey the state of the world before the coming of Christ. The darkness that prevailed is justly styled by the prophet, "*gross darkness*." The most learned philosophers could not absolutely determine whether there were a God; or, if there were, whether there were one or many. They conceived that there were some beings superior to themselves; and them they called gods: but the characters they assigned to them, were such as would disgrace the lowest of the human race. They felt themselves sinners; but the methods which they devised for expiating their crimes were beyond measure absurd. They could not account for the sin and misery which they both saw and felt, nor could they prescribe any remedy for these disorders. "They were vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise, they shewed themselves to be very fools^b." But "the Day-spring from on high," the Lord Jesus Christ, "has visited us, to give light to them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death." He has declared to us fully the nature and perfections of God, the means of reconciliation with him, the duties we owe to him and to each other, and whatever else can conduce to the regulating of our lives or the furthering of our happiness.]

2. By his example—

[Had precepts alone been given us, we should have been ready to construe them in such a way, as would best suit with our carnal prejudices and sensual inclinations. But by exhibiting in his own life a perfect pattern of holiness, he has cut off all occasion for doubt respecting the nature or extent of our duty. We need only to walk as he walked, and we cannot err. Do we desire to ascertain what that service is, which we owe to God? we see in him, that we should have the whole law of God written in our hearts; and that it should be "our meat and our drink to do his will." Do we wish to know how we should conduct ourselves towards our fellow-creatures? We have an unerring rule set before us, in his unruffled meekness, his inexhausted patience, his unbounded love: in laying down his life for his enemies, he has shewn us what we are to do, at least for the brethren, if not also even for our bitterest persecutors. In short, we can be in no situation whatever, wherein his example will not serve as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths: if it do not shew us the precise *act* we are to perform, it will shew us infallibly the *spirit* we are to exercise.]

3. By his influence—

^b Rom. i. 21, 22.^c Luke i. 78, 79.

[The sun is of use to those only who have eyes to see it. But Jesus, at the same time that he imparts light, bestows upon us also the organs of vision whereby we may behold it. He "opens the eyes of our understanding;" and "shines into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." He not only causes "the day to dawn," but is also "the Day-star arising in our hearts^d." He gives the spiritual discernment whereby alone we can discern the things of the Spirit, however clearly they were before revealed. Indeed, our reason is nothing more than a taper which *He* has lighted up in our minds: and much more is the faculty of comprehending the deep things of God, derived from him: so that that inspired testimony concerning him is strictly true, "He is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world^e."]]

From hence we are naturally led to consider,

II. The blessedness of his followers—

We regard with pity the inhabitants of the polar regions, who for half the year are steadily secluded from the cheering rays of the sun. We consider our quicker returns of light and darkness as incomparably more conducive to comfort and prosperity. But infinitely happier is he on whom the Sun of Righteousness has once arisen: for,

1. He shall not walk in darkness—

[Once he was guided altogether by *erroneous principles*. So blind was he, that he "put evil for good, and good for evil; darkness for light, and light for darkness." Nor is this the case only with the ignorant and profane: it is equally true of those whose minds are cultivated, and whose lives are moral. Even Paul before his conversion, fraught as he was with the knowledge of the Scriptures, and zealous in the pursuit of righteousness, perpetrated the most horrible acts of wickedness under the idea of doing God service: "he verily thought with himself that he ought to do the things which he did." But the follower of Christ, the true believer^f, is not suffered to live under the influence of such delusions: his views are rectified: he beholds things in the light in which they are represented in the Scriptures; he has learned from them what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and has his mind cast, as it were, into the very mould of the Gospel.

Once too he indulged himself in *corrupt habits*: whether more

^d 2 Pet. i. 19.

^e John i. 9.

^f Compare John xii. 46. with the text.

or less addicted to gross sin, he loved the ways of the world, and conformed himself to them: all his delight was in the things of time and sense: he lived as if he had nothing else to do, but to consult his reputation, ease, and interests in the world. But, having obtained mercy of the Lord, he now discerns the evil of such a life: he begins to see, that "to be thus carnally-minded is death:" and that there are objects infinitely nobler than those he has regarded, and more deserving his attention. Convinced of this, he "will not live any longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." Instead of "fulfilling any longer the desires of the flesh and of the mind," he strives henceforth to mortify them, and labours to "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

We must add yet again, that he once walked in the darkness of *distressing apprehensions*. God has said, and experience proves, that "there is no peace to the wicked." Every man in his unregenerate state is in bondage to the fear of death, and more or less under the terrors of a guilty conscience. The thoughts of death and judgment are painful to him; and he puts them far from him: he flees to business, to pleasure, to company, in order to dissipate those reflections which he cannot wholly avoid. He has an inward consciousness that he has not sought the Divine favour, and, in consequence of that, a secret fear that he shall not obtain it. From such feelings as these, the believer in Christ is happily delivered. "He knows in whom he has believed, and that his adorable Saviour is able to keep that which he has committed to him." He has learned to reckon death among the number of his friends, and to regard it as the door of entrance into his Father's presence. Instead of being harassed with a "fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation," he enjoys "that peace of God which passeth all understanding."]

2. He shall have the light of life—

[There is a light which *proceeds from life*, and *leads to life*; and that light is his blessed portion. A dead man has no light at all: but a living man has senses given him, on purpose to guard him from things destructive, and to lead him to things conducive to his welfare. The sight, the hearing, the smell, the taste, the touch, have all their appropriate uses; and each has its peculiar office, in circumstances where the others can find no scope for exercise. They are so many sentinels, that guard every avenue of ill, and that give warning on the first approach of evil. Thus protected is the follower of Christ: he has spiritual senses, which, being of quick perception to discern good and evil, give early notice of the things which might prove fatal to the soul. They serve as "a light to his feet, and a lantern to his paths." Solomon justly

observes, that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly^s." This candle being duly trimmed, his way is made plain before his face; and he is enabled to walk without stumbling: "He walks in the light, as God is in the light;" and thus maintains sweet fellowship with God, and a sense of his pardoning love in Christ Jesus^a. If at any time, through temptation or distress, this light burn dim, he cries to his Lord and Saviour, who has promised to send him fresh supplies of *his* Spirit; and speedily does "light arise to him in his obscurity, and his darkness becomes as the noon-day¹." Thus guided through his whole life, he arrives at last at those blessed regions, "whereof the Lamb is the light²," and where "his Lord shall be an everlasting light, and his God his glory³."

APPLICATION—

[You can easily conceive the difference both in the feeling and the safety of one that walks in midnight darkness, and of one that travels in the light of the noon-day sun. O that all would make a just application of this thought to their own case, and resolve without delay to become followers of Christ^m!]

^s Prov. xx. 27.

^a 1 John i. 7.

¹ Isai. lviii. 10.

² Rev. xxi. 23.

³ Isai. lx. 19.

^m John xii. 35, 36. Jer. xiii. 16.

MDCLI.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN NECESSARY.

John viii. 21. *Whither I go ye cannot come.*

THE generality of men conceive that there is no difficulty in securing heaven: and hence they use no efforts to obtain an entrance there. If told, that, in their present state, they could not by any means obtain admission to the Saviour's presence, they would account it a very uncharitable and unwarrantable assertion; and would be as unable to account for it as our Saviour's hearers were when they asked, "Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come." But they consider not what kind of a place heaven is, or what state of mind is necessary for the enjoyment of it. It is certain, however, that what our Lord again and again said to his

hearers^a, is applicable to us at this day. They indeed expected a Messiah, whilst they rejected him whom God had sent; and therefore our Lord says so repeatedly, "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me:" and so far his address to them is not applicable to us, who all acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. But what he adds, is as applicable to us as ever it was to them; since in an unregenerate and unconverted state it is impossible for us ever to behold the face of God in peace.

I am aware that this is an observation that must occasion pain: but, if such persons still exist as those to whom the declaration was made, it is surely the office of love and charity to apprise them of it. You will therefore receive my friendly suggestions in the spirit with which they are offered to you, whilst I shew,

I. To whom this declaration was made—

They are here clearly described by our Lord himself:

1. The worldly-minded—

["Ye are of this world: I am not of this world." Now the worldly are not only put in a state of contrast with the Saviour himself, as in this and other places^b, but with the children of God also: they are represented as being "wiser in their generation than the children of light^c;" and as hating them on account of their stricter course of life: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you^d."

Now it is really not difficult to discover, to which of these opposite parties we belong. Let us only ask, Which we more *esteem*? which we more *desire*? which we more *delight* in, the things of time and sense, or the things which are invisible and eternal? — — — I ask not, Which of the two engages more of our *time*? for our social and civil duties require a great deal of our time: and God himself permits us to labour six days, and to reserve the seventh only for him. But the question is, On which of the two is our heart fixed? Which do we mainly affect, the things of this, or of the future world? If only we

^a John vii. 33, 34. and xiii. 33. with the text.

^b John xvii. 14, 16.

^c Luke xvi. 8.

^d John xv. 19.

mark, which of the two chiefly engages our thoughts, when our minds are free to fix upon the things which are most interesting to us, we shall then see the real bias of our minds, and our true character as before God — — — God has expressly warned us, that “if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us*,” and therefore we are assured beyond all doubt that the lovers of this present world are justly placed among those to whom the declaration in our text pre-eminently pertains.]

2. The unbelieving—

[“If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” Now there is as great a difference between the believer and the unbeliever, as between those who are of this world, and those who are of God. Only see the conduct of believers, and the matter will be as clear as the light itself. The true believer is humbled for his sins, and, under a consciousness of his utter inability ever to reconcile himself to God, he flees to Christ, and lays hold on him, and relies wholly upon his meritorious blood and righteousness, and glories in him as all his salvation and all his desire. The unbeliever, on the contrary, neglects him, and seeks for himself some other ground of hope, if not openly and professedly, yet in the real feelings and dispositions of his soul.

Now it is easy to ascertain, whether from day to day we are bewailing our sinfulness and fleeing to Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before us; or whether we be resting satisfied with some attainments of our own, and only complimenting Jesus with the name of Saviour, without labouring to obtain an interest in him, and cleaving to him with our whole hearts. The exercises of our soul this very day will suffice to shew us, in a great measure, to which of these classes we belong: and whether we be not of those who shall “die in their sins, and never be with Christ where he is.” Beyond all doubt, the unbelieving soul will be excluded from his presence, and never be suffered to taste of his saving benefits.]

Does this appear uncharitable? Then let me remind you, that it is the declaration, not of a fallible man, but of our Lord himself; and let me set before you,

II. The grounds and reasons of it—

It were quite sufficient that our Lord has declared it, even though we were not able to account for that which he has spoken: but we may well and

* 1 John ii. 15, 16.

satisfactorily account for the exclusion of such persons from the presence of God, and from the felicity of heaven. For,

1. There is nothing in heaven suited to their taste—

[What do those persons affect as their supreme happiness on earth? Do they say with the Psalmist, "Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us?" No: they desire nothing beyond the things of time and sense. Some indeed affect only carnal, whilst others delight themselves chiefly in intellectual, pursuits: but still the objects of their desire belong to this world only; and there is no scope for the enjoyment or pursuit of them in heaven. Here a man may have sensual gratifications of various kinds. But feasting, and dancing, and music, and all the other things which are here considered as sources of happiness, terminate with this life: and the man who derives all his satisfaction from them, will find nothing in heaven to please his appetite. And on this very account heaven would be no heaven to him, but only like a prison, where nothing palatable, nothing desirable was afforded to the unhappy tenant. He would be altogether out of his element: and what would be happiness to others, would be misery to him.]

2. They have an utter incapacity to enjoy heaven, even if they were admitted there—

[Supposing for a moment, as our Lord says, that, "instead of coming into that sheepfold through the door, they have climbed up some other way," and obtained by some artifice admission into the assembly of the just; what pleasure could they find either in the company or the employments of heaven? Could they delight themselves in a *Holy God*, whose purity would appal them, and who could not look upon them but with the utmost abhorrence? Could they find pleasure in the sight of that *Saviour*, whom they have all their life long despised, and whose very "blood they have trodden under foot" by continuing in sin? Would the presence of the *glorified saints and angels* be any source of comfort to their minds? With no one of them would they have the slightest possible communion: nor would so much as one of those holy beings admit them into their society. Methinks such persons getting into heaven, would resemble King Uzziah, who went into the temple of God to offer incense: the priests, filled with disgust at his leprous state, "thrust him out thence; yea, he himself also hasted to go out:" so little did the sanctuary of the Most

^f Ps. iv. 6.

^g Hab. i. 13.

^h 2 Chron. xxvi. 20.

High God become him, and so little would their intrusion prove a source of happiness to *them*.

But neither would they find any comfort in the employments of heaven. Never having obtained favour with God, or an interest in the Saviour's merits, they could never join in the songs of praise which are offered there continually by the whole assembly of the redeemed. Nay, as in a concert here on earth, a man unskilled in music, with an inharmonious voice, and an instrument untuned, would, by his efforts to join the choir, only disturb the harmony of the whole, so it would be with them in heaven, where their every note would produce the most hateful discord, and their odious deformity create one universal feeling of disgust.]

3. They are excluded from heaven by an absolute and irreversible decree—

[*Persons* are not the subjects of God's reprobation: *characters* are. When St. Peter says, that "some stumble at the word, being disobedient, *whereunto they were appointed*",¹ the meaning is, not, that they were appointed to stumble or to disobey, but that God had appointed, that they who would not obey the word, should find it a stumbling-block to them; and that they who would not make it "a savour of life, should find it to be a savour unto death".² Now God has ordained that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God"³; and that into heaven "nothing shall enter that defileth".⁴ In particular he has declared, that even the friendship of the world is incompatible with love to him⁵, and that he who believeth not in Christ, shall perish everlastingly⁶. Now I ask, Will God reverse these decrees for *us*? Will he act contrary to his word for *us*? "Is he a man, that he should lie, or the Son of man, that he should repent? Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Know then, that "if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die";⁷ and to hope for heaven in a carnal and unconverted state is only to deceive your own souls.]

Let me then REQUEST of you two things:

1. Inquire what measure of preparation you have for the enjoyment of heaven?

[There is "a *meetness* for the inheritance of the saints in light".⁸ There is a preparation of heart for it, without which heaven would be no heaven to you. An ignorant clown would

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 8. See Doddridge on the place.

² 2 Cor. ii. 16.

³ 1 Cor. vi. 9. ^m Rev. xxi. 27.

ⁿ Jam. iv. 4.

^o ver. 24. with John iii. 36.

^p Numb. xxiii. 19.

^q Rom. viii. 13.

^r Col. i. 12.

find no pleasure in the conversation of men of science, or in the polished society of courtiers. He would soon wish to leave such scenes, and to return to the company that was better suited to his habits, and intelligence. Now in heaven there is one continued effusion of praise from every soul around the throne. Saints and angels join in one general chorus of praise and thanksgiving to God and to the Lamb. Inquire then whether you have learned that song? Inquire whether you have yet tuned your harps, that you may bear your part in that concert? If you have not yet learned to play the higher parts of praise and thanksgiving, can you at least sound the lower notes of humiliation and contrition? Nor think it hard to be put on this inquiry. It is not your minister, but an inspired Apostle, that calls for it at your hands: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates?" Examine carefully whether the things of this world or the felicity of heaven be the higher in your esteem, and the object of your more diligent pursuit? You can easily ascertain your proficiency in earthly things: search then and see whether ye be growing daily in grace, and in a conformity to the Divine image? This inquiry will be made at last by the heart-searching God; and his sentence will be passed upon you in perfect accordance with your real state. I entreat you therefore to "judge yourselves" now, whilst "space is given you for repentance," that you may not be judged of the Lord, when your state will be irremediable and final.]

2. Let the testimony of your conscience produce in you its appropriate effects—

[If conscience bear witness that you have lived to yourselves and to the world instead of living for God and for eternity, begin without delay to implore mercy at the hands of God, and to seek that renovation of heart and life, without which you cannot be saved. Withdraw yourselves from "the world which lieth in wickedness," and give up yourselves to Christ as his redeemed people: and let it henceforth be your daily labour to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life — — —]

But if you can call God to record, that, notwithstanding your many defects, you do indeed set your affections on things above rather than on the things of time and sense, then rejoice and bless God for the work which he has wrought in your hearts; and look to him to "perfect in you the good work he has begun." To you, beloved, I will reverse the text, and say,

"Where Christ is, there shall ye be also." In fact, he has promised, that "where he is, there shall also his servants be." He has actually "gone before, in order to prepare a place for you; and he will shortly come and take you to himself, that you may be with him for ever." In his intercessory prayer, he declared this to be his fixed purpose: "Father, I *will*, that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." Look forward then to that blessed period, when you will be no longer at a distance from him, but enjoy his presence, and inherit his glory, for evermore.]

^t John xiv. 22.

^u John xvii. 24.

MDCLII.

DANGER OF REJECTING CHRIST.

John viii. 24. *If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*

THE necessity of faith in Christ, in order to salvation, is not to be considered as a mere arbitrary appointment: it arises out of the very state into which mankind are fallen: a state in which it would be impossible for them to enjoy God, even if they were admitted into his immediate presence. They are at present laden and defiled with sin; and could derive no comfort from the sight of a holy God. Their iniquities would for ever render *them* odious in *his* eyes, and *him* terrible in *theirs*. They must be cleansed from their sins, before they can hold any communion with him as a Father and a Friend. But they can never wash away their own sins; nor find any other means of expiation besides that which God has ordained, even the blood of his only dear Son. Nor is there any way in which they can be interested in Christ, but by believing in him. Here then we see, that, independent of any particular command respecting it, there is a necessity for faith in Christ, if ever we would be saved at all. For we cannot go to heaven with our sins upon us: and they cannot be removed, but by an atonement: and there is no atonement capable of removing them, but that of

Christ; nor any means of being interested in his atonement but by faith.

That we may see this truth in its just light, we will go back to the preceding chapter. Our Lord had told his unbelieving hearers, that he should soon be withdrawn from them; and that, in consequence of their rejecting the light, "they would never be able to come where he was^a." They, not able to comprehend his meaning, supposed that he intended "to go among the Gentiles:" whither they, on account of their religion, could not follow him^b. The next day he renewed to them the same solemn warning; saying, "I go my way; and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Whither I go, ye cannot come^c." On this, instead of humbly inquiring into his meaning, they scoffingly and impiously asked, "Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come^d." 'No,' says our Lord, 'your sins will be a very sufficient barrier to keep you from me. You are altogether, in every disposition of your hearts, directly contrary to me: and in this state you will be left till death: and so dying, it will be impossible you should ever come where I am going, that is, into the beatific presence of my Father: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am He, ye *shall* die in your sins^e."'

Now, this solemn warning is as applicable to us as to those to whom it was more immediately delivered: and, that we may not slight it as they did, I will proceed to shew,

I. What is comprehended in the faith here spoken of—

At first sight, it appears as if nothing more were required than to acknowledge Jesus as the promised Messiah; and that, consequently, all who bear his name may be considered as possessed of the faith here spoken of. But if we go back to the time of our

^a John vii. 33, 34.

^b John vii. 35, 36.

^c ver. 21.

^d John viii. 22.

^e ver. 23, 24.

blessed Lord, we shall see that the faith, of which he spake, comprehended,

1. A full persuasion of his Messiahship—

[This was necessary then : and it is no less necessary now. And we greatly mistake, if we think this a common attainment amongst those who call themselves Christians. The generality have no better reasons for believing Jesus to be the Messiah, than the Mahomedans have for their faith in that arch-impostor. I mean not however to say, that every Christian must have studied this point so accurately as to be able to answer all the objections of infidels : but, so far as to be able to “ give a reason of the hope that is in him,” and to justify the reliance which he places on the Saviour, every true believer should have studied the point, and made up his mind upon it. Circumstances, I grant, may have been so unfavourable to the attainment of this knowledge that a person’s views may be very indistinct : but, where these have not been such as to preclude a reasonable hope of his acquiring this necessary information, a want of it may well cause him to doubt whether he has ever possessed any true faith at all.]

2. A cordial acceptance of him under that character—

[A speculative assent to the mere abstract truth of his Messiahship was never such a faith as he approved. Many there were who could not resist the evidence of his miracles, who yet were regarded by him as no better than aliens, in whom he could place no confidence[†]. To exercise faith aright, we must receive him in all his offices : we must view him as that Prophet, whom God has sent by his word and Spirit to enlighten us : and as that Great High-Priest, who has made atonement for us, and now intercedeth for us within the veil : and as that King also, who is to reign over us, and to have “ every thought of our hearts brought into captivity” to his holy will. Here, then, the subject before us opens to our view. Faith is not a speculative assent ; but a practical affiance, that leads us to the Saviour for every thing that we stand in need of, for “ wisdom, for righteousness, for sanctification, and for complete redemption.” Then only do we truly believe, when we can say with the Apostle Paul, “ The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me[‡].”]

3. An entire devotion to him, as his disciples—

[This our Lord expressly required of all his followers : “ If any man will be my Disciple, let him deny himself, and

[†] John ii. 23—25.

[‡] Gal. ii. 20.

take up his cross daily, and follow me." Nay, he required that this should be done in defiance of the whole world. He declared, that if any man hated not his father and mother, yea, and his own life also, in comparison of him, he could not be his Disciple. Now, all this is essential to true faith. Whatever was requisite in those days, is requisite still. A man must be wholly given up to Christ; having no will but his; and no object, but to advance his glory. If we have true faith, we shall "henceforth live no more to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again."]

Nothing less than this will constitute a living faith: and our Lord's assertion in relation to it clearly marks,

II. The importance of it to our eternal welfare—

To "die in our sins" is a most fearful doom—

[The man, so dying, goes into the presence of his God with all his sins upon him; with those of early childhood, and those of inconsiderate youth, and those of maturer manhood, yea, and those committed even to the very hour of his departure hence. Alas! what a catalogue is here! a mass numerous and heavy as the sands upon the sea-shore! And for every distinct offence must the soul receive an appropriate recompence at the hands of God. O! who can conceive the anguish of the soul at the instant of its appearance at the tribunal of its Judge! With what horror must it shrink back, to hide itself, if it were possible, under rocks and mountains! And now, when challenged by his God, how mute is he, who once would vindicate himself with such assured confidence! Not for one action of his whole life can he now offer any excuse, nor urge any reason why he should not be consigned to the bottomless abyss in hell. Thither, therefore, is he cast, with all his sins upon him; nor carries he with him so much as a ray of hope to cheer those regions of darkness and despair. Now he knows, what once he was so averse to believe, what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the Living God." Such is the doom that awaits the whole unbelieving world: "They drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and they are tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night^a."]

And this must be the doom of all who believe not in Christ—

^a Matt. xxv. 41, 46. Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

[Our Lord has assured us of it: yea, he has *repeated* it again and again¹. And wherefore has he so solemnly affirmed it? Was he disposed to create unnecessary alarm? or did he feel any pleasure in denouncing woes? No: it was from love he spake: he desired the salvation of his hearers; and, therefore, whilst he encouraged them with words of grace, speaking to them with a wisdom and a tenderness that "never man spake," he warned them of the consequences of rejecting his gracious invitations. Let it not, then, be thought unkind in us, if we also, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuade men^k." It is not to excite unnecessary fears that we thus speak, but to avert the judgments that are impending over your heads. We would not willingly grieve you; but we dare not "prophesy unto you smooth things; we dare not prophesy deceits." Our God has told us, that, "if we forbear to sound the trumpet of alarm, our own souls must perish." Nor will you be at all benefited: for "you will die in your iniquities; and your blood will be required at our hands." If you doubt the truth of what we affirm, look at the frequent *appeals* which God makes to yourselves — — — look at the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Rich Man believed not in Christ, nor gave himself up to him: and when he died, "he died in his sins:" and the next that you hear of him is, that he was "in hell, lifting up his eyes in torments." His five brethren, who inherited his wealth, were following his steps; never dreaming whither he was gone, or whither they themselves were hastening. The man in torments earnestly entreated that one might be sent from the dead, to warn his surviving brethren of the certain issue of their course. But that favour could not be granted. They had Moses and the prophets: and, if they would not receive *their* testimony, no other would be given them. So then you may see the certain consequence of unbelief: and, if you will not credit the testimony of the Lord Jesus, nothing remains for you, but to feel to all eternity what you cannot now be prevailed upon to believe and shun^m.]

Permit me now to RECOMMEND to you,

1. An inquiry into your state, in relation to this matter—

[Do not take it for granted that you are believers in Christ. The Jews thought that they believed Moses, whilst they were acting in direct opposition to his words. And, as they deceived themselves, so do ye, whilst you imagine that you can be saved in *any way* but that of a total surrender of

¹ Shewn in the Introduction.

^k 2 Cor. v. 11.

^l Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9. ^m Heb. ii. 3. xii. 25. and x. 28, 29.

yourselves to Christ. You must be Christ's now, if you would be his hereafter: and if you will not give yourselves up to him, you must "die in your sins." 'I know how averse we are to believe this. Of the thousands that die around us daily, we never entertain a thought whether they died in their sins or not? It seems to us a matter of course, that a person dying goes to a state of happiness: and if a doubt were expressed in relation to the happiness of any one connected with us, we should resent it as the grossest insult. But, I pray you, brethren, whatever charity ye exercise towards others, be careful not to deceive yourselves. Others you may well "leave to their own Master:" but respecting yourselves let no doubt be suffered to remain. Call to mind the description we have before given of a saving faith, and examine yourselves by it. This is the advice of the Apostle Paul: "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." Let your state be ever so good, you can suffer no loss by self-examination: the gold sustains no injury by being tried by the touchstone: nor can ye, if true believers, by the strictest scrutiny. I entreat you, therefore, to "prove your own selves: so shall you have rejoicing in yourselves alone, and not in the delusive testimony of others*."]'

2. A consideration of the doom that awaits the unbelieving soul—

[Doubtless, such a consideration must be painful. But yet, how much better were it to reflect on that doom, whilst by timely penitence it may be averted, than to sustain it through the endless ages of eternity. Reflect, I pray you, what it is to die in your sins? Think what your state would have been at this very hour, if you, by disease or accident, had been taken unprepared into the presence of your God? Ask yourselves, Whether at this moment you have any scriptural ground to believe that your sins have been blotted out; and that, if you were removed hence this very night, your transition would be from a world of vanity to a world of bliss? Think of the unhappy souls that are now gone beyond the reach of mercy; the hearers of our Lord, for instance, who would not regard his warnings, but turned them into ridicule: Would they, think ye, make light of such warnings *now*, if for a few short hours they could be restored to your state? Ah! think how soon their state may become yours! Methinks the very possibility of such an event is enough to make you tremble. "To-day, then, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest you provoke God to swear, in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest."']

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

° Gal. vi. 4.

3. An attention to the blessed truth which our text implies—

[When our Lord says, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins," who does not see what a glorious promise is implied in it; that, if we do believe in him, we shall *not* die in our sins? Yes, this blessed truth is declared throughout the whole Scriptures. Hear what the Apostle said to the jailor. Under a dread of God's wrath, the convicted sinner cried, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and the answer which the Apostle gave was clear and full: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and thou shalt be saved^p." The same say I to you: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through the Lord Jesus Christ is preached unto you the remission of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses^q." O! it is a blessed truth, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus^r!" Their iniquities are blotted out, as "a morning cloud^s:" they stand before God "without spot or blemish^t;" "nor does God himself behold any iniquity in them^u." Believe, then, in Christ, and "live unto him; so, whether living or dying, ye shall be the Lord's^x."]

^p Acts xvi. 31.^q Acts xiii. 38, 39.^r Rom. viii. 1.^s Isai. xlv. 22.^t Eph. v. 27.^u Numb. xxiii. 21.^x Rom. xiv. 8.

MDCLIII.

THE LIBERTY WHICH CHRIST GIVES HIS PEOPLE.

John viii. 36. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

WE are exceedingly backward to acknowledge our true state and condition. In consequence of this we disregard the remedy provided for us, and deprive ourselves of all the blessings of salvation. Nevertheless our gracious Saviour endures us with much long-suffering, and repeats to us the overtures of love and mercy. Thus he acted towards those who denied their need of freedom^a: thus also he addresses himself to us at this time.

^a He might have shewn that their assertions were false: for their ancestors had been in bondage both in Egypt and in Babylon; and at that very time the whole nation was under the Roman yoke. But

It will be profitable for us to consider—

I. In what respects we are in bondage—

We of this nation may justly boast of our civil freedom; but we are, like all the rest of our species, under spiritual bondage.

1. Under the curse of the law—

[The law of God requires perfect and perpetual obedience. It denounces also a curse against us for every transgression^b. Its precepts have been violated by us in ten thousand instances^c. We all therefore, without exception, are obnoxious to its curse. This may well be considered as a state of wretched bondage^d.]

2. Under the power of sin—

[Sin has infected all the members of our body, and the faculties of our soul^e. What can be conceived to argue a state of slavery so much as this^f? This construction is so obvious, that no Christian can doubt respecting it^g. The church of old confessed her iniquities to have been a sore bondage^h, and St. Paul himself could find no better image whereby to express the evil and bitterness of his indwelling corruptionsⁱ.]

3. Under the tyranny of Satan—

[The influence of Satan over us is often denied and ridiculed; but the wickedness of men is ascribed in Scripture to his agency^k, and every impenitent sinner is expressly said to be in bondage to him^l.]

4. Under the fear of death—

[Many will shew a contempt for death on a field of battle, but all fear it in its more gradual approaches. Hence even

our Lord waved the subject of civil liberty, and fixed their attention on a freedom of a very different kind: he shewed them that, though they were the natural descendants of Abraham, they were the servants of sin, and should on that account, like Ishmael, be cast out: while they only, who were the sons of promise, should, like Isaac, abide in the house for ever. (Compare ver. 35. with Gal. iv. 28, 30.) Then, speaking of himself as in a more peculiar manner "*the Son*," and as the seed in whom all nations should be blessed, he again repeated his offer, and encouraged them to accept it.

^b Gal. iii. 10. ^c Rom. iii. 19, 23.

^d Gal. iii. 23. *Ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλεισμένοι* strongly expresses the idea of close custody.

^e Ps. liiii. 3. ^f John viii. 34. ^g Rom. vi. 16.

^h Isai. xxvi. 13. ⁱ Rom. vii. 14, 23. ^k Eph. ii. 2.

^l 2 Tim. ii. 26.

the bravest are averse to meditate on death and judgment. This is declared to be a state of wretched bondage^m.]

Surely the Egyptian or Chaldean yoke was light in comparison of this; yet all may obtain a release from this yoke.

II. How we may be delivered from it—

Vain are all attempts to liberate ourselves by our own strength—

[*We cannot make satisfaction for one single breach of the law.* To do this were beyond the power of the highest archangel. Nothing but the blood of Christ can ever atone for sinⁿ. *We cannot by any means renew and sanctify our own hearts.* There is not in us a sufficiency even to think a good thought^o. Our inclination and ability to do good can come from God alone^p. *It is not in the power of fallen man to resist the assaults of Satan.* There is provided for us armour of a heavenly temper, and in that alone can any man hope to obtain the victory^q. *We are no less unable of ourselves to disarm death of its sting.* In spite of all our efforts its terrors will appal the stoutest heart.]

But “the Son” of God is able and willing to deliver us—

[Christ, as “the Son,” is heir and Lord of all things^r. The very intent for which he came into the world was to give us liberty^s. He has paid down his own life as *the price* of our redemption^t, and therefore may claim us as “his purchased possession.” He is also commissioned to liberate us *by his power*^u. All fulness resides in him for this very purpose^v; nor will he withhold this blessing from any believing soul^w.]

Unspeakably blessed are they to whom this blessing is vouchsafed—

III. What glorious liberty we may obtain—

The liberty which sinners enjoy is merely ideal; but that which Christ will give, is real and substantial^x.

1. He will free us from all our bondage—

[*The law shall never be suffered to execute its curse upon*

^m Heb. ii. 15.

ⁿ Heb. x. 4, 11, 12, 14.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^p Phil. ii. 13.

^q Eph. vi. 11, 13.

^r Heb. i. 2.

^s Isai. lxi. 1.

^t 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^u Luke xi. 20—22.

^v Ps. lxxviii. 18.

^w John i. 12.

^x Ὁρατ.

us:^a Christ gave himself up as our surety, on purpose to redeem us from it^b: it shall have no more power over us than a dead man over the wife that survives him^c. *Sin also shall be cast down from the throne which it has erected within us*; nor, though it may renew its assaults, shall it ever regain its dominion^d. Christ will never suffer this great end of his death to be frustrated^e. *Satan himself too shall yield to the all-conquering arm of Jesus^f, and flee from the face of the very meanest of his saints;^g Nor shall death appear any longer formidable as an enemy^h*; it shall be accounted our gain, and numbered amongst our treasuresⁱ.]

2. He will introduce us to a state of perfect freedom—

[There is “a glorious liberty into which God’s children shall be brought.” Christ will pour into their hearts a spirit of adoption^k, and admit them to the most intimate fellowship with himself^l. The most difficult duties also he will render pleasant to their souls^m; nor will he confine his blessings to this present life. To all eternity shall his redeemed delight themselves in him: their capacity of enjoyment shall be inconceivably enlarged; and every power be freely exercised in its proper functions.]

INFERENCES—

1. How glorious a Saviour is Jesus Christ!

[There is no bond-slave whom he will not liberate. He offers too this liberty “without money, and without price.” He even esteems himself glorified in conferring it upon us. Let us all admire and adore his goodness, and by faith apply to him for this perfect freedom.]

2. How just will be the condemnation of those that perish!

[None ever perish but through their own fault; their condemnation is the consequence of their obstinate attachment to the bonds in which they are heldⁿ. O that men would reflect how they will one day condemn themselves! Let it be remembered that such offers of mercy will never be made to us in the eternal world. This is a day of grace; but there will come a day of vengeance^o. Let every one then lay the blame where it is justly due, and follow without delay the salutary advice of David^p—]

^a Rom. viii. 1.

^b Gal. iii. 13.

^c Rom. vii. 1—4.

^d Rom. vi. 6—14.

^e Tit. ii. 14.

^f Rom. xvi. 20.

^g Contrast 2 Tim. ii. 26. with Jam. iv. 7.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 55.

ⁱ Phil. i. 23. 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^k Rom. viii. 15.

^l Rev. iii. 20.

^m Ps. cxix. 32.

ⁿ John iii. 19.

^o Isai. lxi. 2.

^p Ps. ii. 12.

MDCLIV.

THE TRUE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM.

John viii. 39. *If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

THERE is in men an extreme readiness to deceive themselves in reference to their state before God. Any delusion, however absurd, shall serve them for a ground of hope; and they will cling to it with as much confidence as if it were an express declaration of God himself. The Jews conceived that the mere circumstance of their descent from Abraham was sufficient to justify their expectation of the Divine favour, at the very time that they were living in all manner of iniquity. John the Baptist expostulated with them upon this head: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." St. Paul also warned them, that "all were not Israel who were of Israel; neither, because they were all the seed of Abraham, were they therefore, in a higher and more refined sense, his children^a." No: "if they were Abraham's children, *in this sense*," they, as our blessed Lord here told his persecutors, would do the works of Abraham. Here we have a test whereby our spiritual relation to Abraham may be ascertained: and we shall do well to consider it,

I. For the informing of our judgment—

The more we enter into the true import of this declaration, the more shall we be convinced that it contains,

1. A reasonable test—

[There are enthusiasts in the world who will persuade themselves that they are the Lord's people, because they have had a revelation of it from heaven, or a dream whereby it has been made known to them; or, because they have had some portion of the Holy Scriptures applied to their souls in so forcible

^a Rom. ix. 6, 7.

a manner as to convince them that the testimony came to **them** from God himself. But all this is a mere delusion. I say **not** that God *may* not reveal to any man whatsoever he *pleases* : but I do say, that we have no reason whatever to **expect** that God will make known to us, by revelation, any thing which, without such a miraculous interference, may be easily and safely deduced from his blessed word. He has told us, that “ a tree is to be known by its fruits ;” and that the same means whereby we ascertain the quality of what is natural, must be used for the discovering of what is spiritual ; or, in other words, that men are to be known and judged by the fruits which display themselves in their lives. This we all acknowledge to be reasonable, in forming our estimate of a tree ; and it is no less so as a test for discovering the state and quality of our souls.]

2. An impartial test—

[There is no man whatever who may not here find a **glass** in which to behold his own face. The old, the young, the rich, the poor, the learned, the unlearned, may all judge themselves by this test. Of course, some allowance must be made for the different capacities of men, and the different opportunities which they have enjoyed of serving God. We do not expect the same degree of improvement from one who has possessed but two talents, which we look for from him who has had ten talents committed to his care. “ From him to whom God has committed much, he will expect the more.” But, making due allowance for these circumstances, every child of man may apply to himself this test, and may form, by means of it, a just estimate of his real character.]

3. A certain test—

[We are assured, by our Lord himself, that “ a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit, nor can a bad tree bring forth good fruit.” There is but one principle in the world that will sanctify the soul, and that is faith. And this principle, if genuine, cannot but be productive of universal holiness. Hence we may lay it down as an infallible rule : “ By this, the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil : he that doeth not righteousness, is not of God.”]

Now, then, let us adopt this test,

II. For the trying of our state—

Of course, our first endeavour must be to learn what were Abraham's works ; for, till we have ascertained that point, we cannot institute a comparison between him and us, or learn with any accuracy how

^b 1 John iii. 10.

far we resemble him. Now, our Lord complained of his hearers, that, instead of believing his word and obeying his voice, they sought to kill him: "Now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth which I have heard of God. THIS DID NOT ABRAHAM." No:

Abraham believed all that God revealed to him, and obeyed all that God commanded him—

[God revealed to him, that he should have, by Sarah, a son, from whom should proceed a progeny numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sands upon the sea-shore; and, finally, a seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. But no less than five-and-twenty years did he wait for this promised seed; even till, according to the course of nature, he could not have a child; he being one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety. But did his faith fail him? No: "he never once staggered at the promise through unbelief;" but against hope, he believed in hope; "being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able also to perform".]

At the same time that this revelation was given him, a command was also issued, that he should "leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house; and go to a land which should in due season be pointed out to him^d:" and without hesitation did he yield obedience to this strange mandate*. Another more remarkable command was given him afterward, even to take this very child of promise, and offer him up for a burnt-offering on a mountain that should be pointed out to him. Instantly, without so much as communicating with his wife upon the subject, he took the lad, and prosecuted his journey with him, for the space of three days, to the place appointed; and there proceeded to offer him up, in the way that had been enjoined. Here was another act of obedience that never had its parallel since the foundation of the world^f.]

Now, then, see whether you do these works of Abraham—

[Of course, we have not ourselves received either the same revelations or the same commands. But we may see whether we have the same principle of faith as he, and whether it operate to produce the like obedience. To us is that Promised Seed revealed; and we are told to look for all blessings from him. Yes, Christ is that Promised Seed, in whom alone can any child of man obtain the blessings of salvation.

* Rom. iv. 16—21.

^d Gen. xii. 1—4.

* Heb. xi. 8.

^f Heb. xi. 17—19.

Are we then going to him, and relying on him, and receiving from him all that we need for the salvation of our souls? Are we looking to him daily, and to him alone, for "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption?" O! inquire whether you are thus living a life of faith on the Son of God, as having loved you, and given himself for you — — —

Then see, whether, in compliance with God's command, you have come out from the ungodly world, and set out upon a journey towards that land, that good land flowing with milk and honey, which, however, you never have seen, nor can see till your pilgrimage shall have come to a close. And are you, in your way thither, sacrificing to God your dearest interests and most darling lusts? Say, do you take your very Isaac, and sacrifice him with your own hand? This will shew you whose children you are: for none but a child of Abraham can ever so resemble that father of the faithful: whilst it is equally certain that "every child of his will thus walk in his steps^g."

APPLICATION—

1. Make use then, I pray you, of *this test*, for the ascertaining of your state—

[You are not Christians because you were born of Christian parents, and have been educated in the Christian faith. True Christianity is seated in the heart, and displays itself in the life^h — — — And remember, there is no medium between children of God and children of the wicked one: so that, if it cannot be said with truth that God is your Father, it must be said, "Ye are of your father the devilⁱ:" and with him must you take your portion, even "with him, whose ye are, and whom ye serve." I pray you, then, "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; and prove your own selves" with the utmost diligence; lest, while ye call yourselves Abraham's children, and hope to "sit down with him for ever in the kingdom of your God," you be disclaimed by him at the last, and be "thrust out of the mansion^k" where he dwells, and where no unclean thing can ever enter.]

2. And use also *this example* as a stimulus to your exertions—

[See the heights to which your father Abraham attained; and strive, to the utmost of your power, not to come short of them — — —]

^g Rom. iv. 12.

ⁱ ver. 44.

^h Rom. ii. 28, 29. *Cite*, and expatiate on this.

^k Luke xiii. 28.

MDCLV.

LOVE TO CHRIST A TEST OF OUR RELATION TO GOD.

John viii. 42. *Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me.*

IF experience did not convince us, we could scarcely believe that presumption should be so rooted in the heart of man as we find it is. That it should exist, not only without any grounds, but in opposition to the strongest possible evidence, and be held fast with a pertinacity which nothing can shake, is truly surprising. Yet so it is: men believe that God is their Father, though not one feature of his image is found upon them, and their resemblance to Satan is complete. The Jews accounted themselves children of God merely because of their carnal descent from Abraham, his friend: and when our Lord endeavoured to shew them, from their works, that they could have no spiritual relation either to Abraham or to God, they could not so much as understand his words; so strange and incomprehensible did his distinctions appear. But, as he had just before shewn them that their works disproved their relation to Abraham, so now he appeals to their works as undeniable evidences that they were not children of God; "If God were your Father, ye would love me."

In discoursing on these words, we shall,

I. Consider the test here proposed—

Our Lord is proving that his obstinate opponents neither were, nor could be, children of God: and he gives them a test whereby they may try themselves. Now this test was the most easy, and most certain, that could be imagined: for if they were children of God,

1. They would *have in themselves* a disposition to love—

[God is love; and all his children bear his image, especially in this particular. However vile they may have been in their unregenerate state, "living in malice and envy, hateful

and hating one another," by regeneration their evil dispositions are mortified, and a spirit of humility and love becomes the governing principle of their souls. This change is universal: it is the leading feature by which every child of God is known. The want of it, whatever else we may possess, infallibly proves us children of the wicked one. "Though we should know all the mysteries of our holy religion, and have a faith that can remove mountains, and give all our goods to feed the poor, and even give our bodies to be burnt for Christ, if we had not the principle of love in our hearts, we should be only as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals."]

2. They would *find in Christ* whatever was suited to conciliate their regard—

[This our Lord particularly specifies. He had "proceeded and come forth from God," in a way in which no creature ever had^a. He was the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts: he had not come of his own mind, like the false prophets, but was sent from God; as his credentials abundantly testified. Nor was he doing his own will, but the will of Him that sent him: nor did he seek his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent him. Seeing then that he was the Father's Messenger to them; that he was come not only to reveal the way of salvation to them, but to obtain salvation for them, by bearing their sins in his own body on the tree; seeing that in the prosecution of this work he had displayed such unerring wisdom, such indefatigable diligence, such invincible patience, such almighty power, and such unbounded love; could they do otherwise than love him, if they were children of God? Could they be blind to so much excellence, and insensible of so much kindness, if God were their Father? Impossible. It could not be that God should leave his own children so much under the power of the devil, as to reject the mercy he had prepared for them, and destroy the Messenger whom he had sent to redeem them.]

That we may see more clearly the suitableness of this test, we will,

II. Compare it with other tests which men devise for themselves—

Every man has some ground on which he builds his hopes, and some test whereby he tries his title to heaven. This test varies according to the attainments

^a The terms here used, being never used in reference to any other person, are supposed to denote his eternal generation. But though there is ground for the remark, we would not lay much stress upon it.

which each person has made, or thinks he has made, in religion; every one fixing his own standard, and so drawing the line as to include himself within the number of God's elect. They are children of God, because,

1. They have committed no gross sin—

[Be it so: they have kept within the bounds which the world prescribes for our moral and religious conduct: but is this sufficient to prove them children of God? Yea, rather, does not the complacency which they feel in consequence of this partial obedience prove them indisputably to be children of the devil? What is, in fact, the language of their hearts? Is it not *this*? 'It is needless to love and serve God: to obey his law is quite superfluous: all that we need to do, is, to abstain from gross sin: if we do that, we need not alarm ourselves about the displeasure of God: we are in no danger of perishing: we need not trouble ourselves about a Saviour: we have all the righteousness that God requires, and may look forward with confidence to our final acceptance with him.' Yes, this, I say, is the language of their hearts: and I leave you to judge how far such a state of mind can be an evidence of their being children of God. In truth, all the gross sins that they could possibly commit would not more clearly prove them children of the devil, than this impiety: the weight and number of their sins indeed might be increased; but, as a test, nothing can be more decisive of their state, than such vain confidence as this.]

2. They approve of the doctrines of the Gospel—

[It matters little what doctrines we embrace, unless they operate to the renovation of our souls. Our Lord intimates that many will express a considerable degree of zeal in his cause, preaching his Gospel, and casting out devils in his name, who yet will be rejected by him at last, because they did not experience any sanctifying efficacy from his Gospel; "their saying, Lord, Lord, will not avail them any thing, because they did not the will of his heavenly Father." Indeed a knowledge of the Gospel tends rather to aggravate the guilt of those who do not practically embrace it; because they sin against greater light, and against the convictions of their own conscience. The Jews were filled with zeal for the law of Moses, and were ready to put our Lord to death for supposed violations of it: but were they therefore children of God? No: though they pretended such high respect for the law, they did not themselves keep the law, as our Lord told them; and that very law would condemn them in the last day. It is plain therefore that an

assent to any system of divine truth can never be an adequate test of our relation to God.]

3. They have experienced a change both in their views and conduct—

[This comes to nearly the same point as the two preceding: for the circumstance of our having formerly been more erroneous in our views, or more vicious in our conduct, can never make us right, if we stop short of that change which God requires. It is true that a reformation of our life seems to manifest the operation of divine grace, and in that view to sanction a confidence that we are children of God: but Herod still continued a child of the devil, notwithstanding, in compliance with John's admonitions, "he did many things." The stony-ground hearers are represented as experiencing a great and joyful change; and the thorny-ground hearers even bring forth fruit, and continue to do so to their dying hour; yet neither the one nor the other are acknowledged by God as his children, because they "bring not forth fruit unto perfection."]

4. But view, in opposition to all these tests, the one which our Lord proposed to the Jews—

[That is perfect and complete; and will decide the point beyond all possibility of mistake. Let it only be clearly ascertained that we love Christ, and our relation to God will be unquestionable: for though it may be said, that the love of Christ is not of itself a performance of all our duty; yet it must be said, on the other hand, that it is a principle which will yield universal obedience: nor is it possible to have a true love to Christ in our hearts without loving, and longing to fulfil, the whole will of God. Whilst therefore the tests which men adopt for themselves are universally defective and fallacious, this is perfectly adequate to the end proposed: for no man can be a child of God who cannot abide that test; nor can any man be a child of Satan, if the love of Christ be found in his heart.]

Let us then proceed to,

III. Try ourselves by it—

The inquiry is simple: Do we love,

1. His person?

"To them that believe, he is precious;" "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." Is he so to us? Have "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father?" Have we seen him to be "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person?" Have

we seen, concentered in him all divine and human excellence, so as to be constrained to say, "Who is like unto Thee?" And do we "account all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of him?" If we love him aright, our love to him must infinitely exceed all creature-attachment: life itself must have lost its value, in comparison of his will and his glory. To say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," must be the summit of our ambition, more in our estimation than ten thousand worlds. Inquire then whether this be indeed the habit of your minds? The splendour of the sun eclipses the feebler radiance of the stars: and in like manner will the glory of the Sun of Righteousness, if it be indeed beheld by us, cause all sublunary glory to vanish from before our eyes.]

2. His ways?

["He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," saith our Lord himself. We know how strongly even creature-affection will operate to make us consult the wishes, and perform the will, of the object beloved: and the love of Christ will assuredly operate in the same manner: it will "constrain us to live, not to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again." His commandments, whatever self-denial they may require, will never appear grievous; but we shall account his service to be perfect freedom. In proportion as "God enlarges our hearts," it will be our delight to "*run* the way of his commandments." How is it then with us in this respect? Are we panting after higher degrees of holiness, and labouring with augmented diligence to do whatsoever will be pleasing in his sight? Are we "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before," accounting nothing attained whilst any thing remains to be attained, and longing to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?" *This, this* is the fruit of love: and if we say that we love Christ whilst we are strangers to this frame, "we are liars, and the truth is not in us^b."]

3. His salvation?

[It cannot fail but that, if we love Christ, we must love that glorious plan of salvation which he has revealed to us, "and glory above all things in the cross of Christ:" there will appear a suitableness in it, a perfect correspondence with all our wants and necessities. The atonement which Christ has offered for us will be regarded with wonder and admiration, as the most mysterious fruit of divine wisdom, and the most stupendous effort of divine love. The opening made by it for the harmonious exercise and united display of all the divine

^b 1 John ii. 4.

perfections will fill the soul with rapture, and constrain it to vie with all the hosts of heaven in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: therefore blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."]

4. His glory?

[We shall not be indifferent to this, if we love him in truth: we shall wish that his name may be known, his salvation enjoyed, and his glory be exalted, throughout all the earth. As those who preceded his advent longed for his appearance upon earth, so shall we long for his fuller manifestation to the world, that heaven itself may be brought down to earth, and all the kingdoms of the world be his undivided empire. It will grieve us to see that any of the human race are ignorant of him, and that he is dishonoured by so many of those who enjoy the light of his Gospel: and we shall be praying from our inmost souls, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." If we can do any thing for the conversion of Jews or Gentiles, we shall gladly exert ourselves to the utmost; if by any means we may be the honoured instruments of extending his dominion, even though it should be only over the soul of one single individual.

What now does conscience say to these things? Have we indeed the love of Christ in us; and does it extend thus to every thing relating to him, his person, his ways, his salvation, his glory?]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who can stand this test—

[Happy indeed are ye, who, when Christ puts the question to you, "Lovest thou me?" can answer, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Ye assuredly are children of God; and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" — — — Yet remember, that your evidence of this relation exists only in proportion as the love of Christ *reigns* in your souls. If any sin whatever *have dominion* over you, your evidence is destroyed, or rather, it is evident you are *not* the Lord's. This is so strongly asserted by God himself, that we would wish you never for one moment to lose sight of it, lest your presumption be like that of the Jews, and issue, like theirs, in everlasting ruin*.]

2. To those who are condemned by it—

[These, alas! are the great majority of the Christian world. If the love of *self*, or the love of *the world*, had been the test of

* 1 John iii. 6—10.

our relation to God, then would he have had many children amongst us, whose evidence would be clear, and their claim indisputable. But we must stand or fall by another test, even by that proposed by our Lord himself^d. See then what ye have to do. You have not to fulfil the whole law in order to become children of God; (*that* were indeed a hopeless case :) but to get the love of Christ in your hearts. And can you feel any backwardness to that? Methinks, the difficulty should be to refrain from loving him. Only think who he is; and what he has done and suffered for you: think what excellencies unite in him, and how great will be the comfort of loving him: think how willing he is to reconcile you to God, and to bring you into the family of heaven. Only believe in him, love him, and give yourselves to him; and all shall yet be well with you, both in time and eternity.]

^d Compare 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

MDCLVI.

UNBELIEF TRACED TO ITS SOURCE.

John viii. 46. *If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*

ONE would reasonably suppose, that if Almighty God were to become a man, and to labour for the instruction of his creatures in a way of daily and familiar intercourse, and were to confirm his testimony by miracles without number, it would be impossible for men to withstand the influence of his word. But the experiment has been made; and men have shewn a degree of perverseness, of which one could scarcely have conceived them capable. Sometimes they would endeavour to justify their opposition, by accusing our Lord Jesus of violating the law of Moses. But they were invariably put to shame; the falsehood and malignity of their charges being exposed by him with unanswerable force and demonstration. It was to opponents of this description that he addressed the words before us: "Which of you convinceth me of sin? And, if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?"

From these words, I will take occasion to mark,

I. The prevalence of unbelief—

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Men believed not even our Lord himself—

[He spoke to more advantage than any other person ever did: he spoke with *more wisdom*: his very enemies were constrained to say, "Never man spake like this man^a." He spoke with *more authority*: in this respect he differed widely from the Scribes and Pharisees^b, yea, and from Prophets and Apostles too: "Verily, verily, *I say unto you*," was with him a common mode of uttering his instructions. He spoke with *more grace*, so that his adversaries themselves wondered at the gracious words that proceeded from his lips^c. He confirmed his word with *more miracles*: for he alone, in the short space of three years, wrought more miracles than ever were wrought, either before or since, from the foundation of the world to the present moment. Moreover, in confirmation of all that he said, *he appealed to Moses*, whom the Jews themselves professed to venerate, and of whose inspiration they had no doubt. Yet the people would not believe him: *though they could not controvert one word that he uttered*, yet would they not receive his declarations. *The tidings which he brought to them were such as one might have supposed they should receive with all readiness of mind*: yet would they not believe him. He declared himself sent from God to be their deliverer from sin and Satan: and he assured them, that if they would believe in him, he would make them "free indeed^d;" free from the guilt of all their sins; free from the condemnation due to them; free also from the power and dominion of sin; and free to serve their God in newness of heart and life. But still it was all in vain: for they would not believe his testimony in any respect.]

Nor are his servants believed at this day—

[Every faithful servant of Christ bears the same testimony that Christ himself did; and his one object is, to commend Christ to men as the Redeemer of the world. We declare, that men are in a state of bondage; that no man can deliver himself; that Christ is sent of God to be the Saviour of the world; and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things." We cannot work miracles in confirmation of this doctrine: but we can appeal to the miracles by which it was confirmed in the days of Christ and his Apostles. And not only to the Scriptures do we refer, in proof of our declarations, but to the authorized standard of truth contained in the Articles and Homilies of the Established Church. We bring also the very prayers which every member of the Established Church uses from time to time; and we do not hesitate to say, that every doctrine not contained in those formularies is

^a John vii. 46.

^c Luke iv. 22.

^b Matt. vii. 29.

^d ver. 36.

undeserving of any serious regard. Yet will not men believe us, any more than they believed our blessed Lord. They will cry out against us, as introducing new doctrines, though they are so fully maintained by our own Church, and by all the Apostles and Prophets from the foundation of the world. Let a minister preach any self-righteous doctrines subversive of the Gospel, and he will be credited by all: but where the Gospel comes, a division immediately ensues; and, if *some* receive the word, vast multitudes will be found to reject it.]

To account for this unbelief, I will point out,

II. The source from whence it flows—

Men can give no satisfactory reason for it: for they have in their own minds somewhat of a conviction, that what they oppose is true. Hence our Lord said, and we also may adopt his words, “If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?” The true reason of men’s unbelief is, that they have within them “an evil heart,” from whence it proceeds*. In answer to our Lord’s question, then, I will tell you why you do not believe.

1. You will not inquire into what you hear—

[Men hear us, as they heard our blessed Lord: but they will not examine whether what they hear agrees with the voice of inspiration, or whether it corresponds with their own experience. We tell them of their guilt: we declare to them their danger: we make known to them the way of salvation: but whether they assent to what they hear, or dissent from it, they alike are sunk in unbelief; because they will not take the pains necessary for investigating the subject, or ascertaining the agreement of our statements with the truth of God. In this the inhabitants of Thessalonica shewed themselves peculiarly defective, whilst the Bereans prosecuted a wiser and better plan: “The Bereans were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily, to see if these things were so: and therefore *many of them*, it is said, *believed*†.” If men will leave truth unexplored, it is no wonder if they doubt its excellence, or deny its very existence.]

2. You are averse to the truth, as far as it comes before you—

[Our Lord’s hearers “believed him not, *because* he told them the truth‡.” And so it is now. If we declare to you your undone state, you do not like to hear of it. If we affirm

* Heb. iii. 12.

† Acts xvii. 11, 12.

‡ ver. 45.

the impossibility of saving yourselves by any thing that you can do, and the indispensable necessity of looking for salvation through Christ alone, you are offended, and represent us as depreciating good works, and encouraging licentiousness. If we call you to renounce the world, and to give up yourselves to the service of your God, you are displeased, because we would tear you from your idols, and call you to a life which you do not affect. Our Lord tells us, that "the world hated him, because he testified of it that its works were evil^b." And this constitutes the peculiar guilt of unbelief; as our Lord has said: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved: but he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God¹." We have a striking example of this in the chief priests and elders, who demanded by what authority our Lord drove the buyers and sellers from the temple. He, instead of giving them a direct answer, put a question to them concerning John, desiring them to say, "whether his baptism was from heaven, or of men." They saw, that if they acknowledged it to be from heaven, he would ask, "Why then did ye not believe him?" and, not choosing to confess the truth, declined answering his question at all^k. Thus the same dishonesty prevails amongst us: and, even when convinced in our minds respecting the truth of a statement, we refuse to admit its truth, because it militates against our principles or habits.]

3. You are determined to hold fast your lusts, which are condemned by it—

[Men love the world, and will hear of nothing that requires them to renounce it. They desire to stand high in the estimation of men, and will not conform to sentiments or habits which will endanger the loss of it. They are often persuaded in their minds that what they hear is true and good: but then they consider how far their adoption of it will interfere with their worldly interests. Among the chief rulers, we are told, many believed on Christ: but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God¹." And hence our Lord said to his hearers, "How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God

^b John vii. 7.

^k Matt. xxi. 23—27.

¹ John iii. 19—21.

¹ John xii. 42.

only^m?" This is at the root of unbelief, in all instances where much instruction has been given; "Men hate to be reformed; and therefore cast God's word behind themⁿ."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who persuade themselves that they already believe—

[If an assent to the truths of Christianity were real faith, there would be no further room for that complaint which, all the Prophets and Apostles made, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" But it is not faith; or, at least, it is only "the faith of devils^p." Saving faith would bring you to a cordial reception of the Lord Jesus Christ in his proper character, as the Redeemer of men, and the Saviour of the world. The Jews denied that they were in bondage^q; and so do the generality of men amongst ourselves: and hence they disregarded the offer of a Deliverer, as we also do. But this proved them to be in unbelief: and it proves the same respecting us. I pray you, brethren, deceive not yourselves with the idea that you are believers, whilst your faith is inoperative and unproductive. If your faith do not bring you to Jesus as your only hope; if it do not bring you to him to be made free indeed—free from sin, as well as free from guilt; I declare unto you, that you are yet in unbelief, "you are yet in your sins^r." Whilst you imagine that an unproductive assent to the Gospel is saving faith, you deceive your own souls. You may call *us* Antinomians, for exalting the exclusive efficacy of faith to save the soul: but *you* are the Antinomians, who maintain your faith to be saving whilst it produces no sanctifying effects upon you.]

2. Those who think that they have no occasion for faith—

[It has been said, that his faith cannot be wrong, whose life is in the right. But no man's life can be right, till he is united unto Christ by faith. He wants that principle which alone can sanctify the soul. But, let our sanctification be ever so perfect, will any man presume to put that in the place of Christ's atoning sacrifice? Will any man rely on his own merits, rather than on Christ's obedience unto death? Ah! fatal error! Not even Paul himself could be saved by the works of the law; and therefore he "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in him^s." And in this way must

^m John v. 44.

ⁿ Ps. l. 17.

^o Isai. liii. 1.

^p Jam. ii. 19.

^q ver. 33.

^r ver. 24.

^s Phil. iii. 9.

every one of you be saved. You must renounce all dependence on yourselves, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ as your only hope. If you will not believe this, go and try the experiment: go and try by your own righteousness to satisfy the justice of Almighty God; and by your own arm to vanquish all your spiritual enemies. But both the one and the other of these things are impossible to mortal man: and therefore go with all humility to the Son of God; and know, that "if the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed."]

MDCLVII.

ABRAHAM'S VIEWS OF CHRIST.

John viii. 56. *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it, and was glad.*

ONE cannot read any of our Lord's discourses without seeing the need of a spiritual discernment. For want of it, his hearers could not understand his plainest assertions. It being his object to convey spiritual instruction, he used such expressions as were suited to that end: but his hearers annexed only a carnal sense to them, and therefore conceived of him as talking like a maniac; "Thou hast a devil, and art mad." One expression in particular gave them the highest offence: he had said, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death:" this they interpreted as relating to the death of the body; and, well knowing that Abraham and the prophets had all died, they could not endure such arrogance as that assertion implied; since it, in fact, exalted *him* above Abraham himself. Though they misconstrued his meaning, our Lord would not deny the inference which they drew from his words; but, on the contrary, confirmed it; and told them, that, contemptible as they thought him, Abraham himself had "eagerly desired to see his day," and, on being favoured with a sight of it, "had greatly rejoiced." At this they stumbled still more: and, on being further assured by him that he existed before Abraham was born, they took up stones to stone him.

* This must be the sense of *ἡγαλλιάσατο* in this place; else there would be a manifest tautology.

In the assertion before us, however ridiculous it appeared to their carnal apprehensions, is contained a most important truth : to illustrate which, we shall shew,

I. What were Abraham's views of Christ—

To mark this with precision is no easy matter. If we suppose that Abraham understood the types as we do, his views of Christ were complete indeed : for, from the appearance of Jehovah to him in human shape^b, he would behold *the incarnation of Christ* ; and from Melchizedec, to whom Abraham himself offered tithes of all that he possessed, and from whom also he received a blessing^c, he would know *the everlasting priesthood of Christ*, and the necessity of depending on him for all spiritual blessings. Moreover, from his being ordered to offer Isaac upon an altar on Mount Moriah (the very place where Christ was afterwards crucified ;) and from Isaac being restored to him, when in Abraham's purpose he was already dead ; he would learn *the sacrifice of Christ by the hand, as it were, of his own Father*^d, and *his resurrection from the dead*. And as he is said to have made this offering "by faith," and to have "received his son from the dead in a figure," we are by no means certain that he did not see the mystery contained in that remarkable transaction^e. But we wish always to lean to the safe side in our interpretations of Holy Writ, and rather to assert too little than too much : we therefore content ourselves with ascribing to Abraham such views only as the New Testament writers have clearly assigned to him. He saw then,

1. The person and work of Christ as a Saviour—

[He saw that there was some particular person who should spring from him, distinct from, and superior to, all his other descendants^f. He saw that the covenant which God had condescended to make with him was confirmed and ratified in that particular individual^g. He saw that that person was to be a source of blessings to mankind ; and *that*, not to

^b Gen. xviii. 2, 22, 25, 27, 30.

^d Isai. liii. 10.

^f Gal. iii. 16.

^c Gen. xiv. 17—20.

^e See Heb. xi. 17—19.

^g Gal. iii. 17.

one nation only, but to all the nations of the earth. He saw, that though the land of Canaan was promised to him and his posterity, this was not the only, or the chief, blessing which they were to inherit: on the contrary, he regarded Canaan only as a type of a better inheritance^b; and saw distinctly, that grace and glory were the special benefits which the promised Seed should obtain for them^c. Whether he knew precisely *in what manner* Christ was to obtain these things for us, we do not undertake to determine; but that Christ was to be the one fountain of these blessings to the world, he knew assuredly: for on that very truth he grounded all his hopes of salvation.]

2. The method of a sinner's justification through him—

[We are continually told, "that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness." But was it *the act of faith* that constituted his justifying righteousness before God? If so "he has whereof to glory;" (in direct opposition to St. Paul's assertion); and he was saved by works, and not by faith only^k (for faith, *as an act of our own*, is a work, as much as love, or any other act). No: it was by *the object of faith* that he was justified, even by that promised Seed, who died for him upon the cross: and it was to that promised Seed that he looked for a justifying righteousness before God^l.

It may be said, in opposition to this, that St. James says he was justified by works, and particularly by offering up his son Isaac upon the altar^m. But a very little consideration will suffice to shew, that he does not contradict the assertions of St. Paul. *When* was Abraham justified? I answer, the very moment he believed the declaration of God with respect to the promised Seedⁿ. But this was long before any of those acts of obedience for which we might suppose him to have been justified: it was no less than twenty-four years before he was circumcised^o: and consequently, forty, if not fifty, years, before that act of obedience which St. James refers to^p. This indisputably proves, that the offering up of Isaac was not *the ground* of his justification before God; but that it was only *an evidence* of the truth and sincerity of that faith whereby he was justified. The righteousness of Christ was that by which he was justified; his *faith* was only *the means*

^b Heb. xi. 9, 10, 13—16.

^c Luke i. 68—75. Compare with Gal. iii. 14, 18.

^k Rom. iv. 1—5.

^l Rom. iii. 21—26. and v. 18.

^m Jam. ii. 21—23.

ⁿ Gen. xii. 1—3. and xv. 5, 6.

^o Compare Gen. xii. 4. with xvii. 1, 24. and Rom. iv. 9—12.

^p Gen. xxii. 1, 2.

of his justification; and *his works* were the evidence of his justification: *by faith* he apprehended Christ; and by offering up his son (*from whom Christ was to spring*), he shewed the reality and strength of his faith.

This great truth, that we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is the one grand point in which the whole Gospel centers: and this point Abraham saw, not only in reference to himself, but in reference also to the whole world; as well those who should not derive their natural descent from him, as those who should^a. Other things he might see more or less distinctly; but this he saw as clearly as we ourselves can do; yea, happy would it be for many, if they saw it half so clearly as he did^r.]

From knowing what his views of Christ were, we shall be at no loss to say,

II. Why he so exulted in them—

Though we should estimate his knowledge by the lowest standard, the event which he foresaw could not fail of being a source of much joy to him,

1. Because of the mystery contained in it—

[Frequently does St. Paul characterize the Gospel as a "mystery that from eternity was hid in the bosom of God," and as containing "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". Another Apostle represents the very "angels in heaven as desiring to look into it," and to search out, if possible, its immeasurable extent^t.

Do we wonder then that Abraham rejoiced in the manifestation of this to his soul? To see such a display of the divine perfections, all exhibited in the person of one who should spring from his loins; to see a descendant of his own effecting what all the angels in heaven would in vain have endeavoured to effect; to see him, by his own obedience unto death, bringing more honour to God than all the obedience of angels ever brought, and more good to man than he would have enjoyed if he had never sinned at all; I say, to see such "a day" as this, might well fill him with all the rapture that feeble mortality could sustain. When this mystery began to be more fully manifested in the incarnation of Christ, a multitude of the heavenly host, astonished, as it were, at the display of the Divine glory, commenced a new song, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." And from that period it has been the one theme of praise and

^a Gal. iii. 8, 9.

^t Col. ii. 3.

^r Rom. iv. 18—22.

^t 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

adoration among saints on earth and saints in heaven. Yea, so glorious, so inexhaustible is the subject, that after millions of years it will be as new and interesting as ever: and to all eternity, notwithstanding it will be progressively unfolded to the admiring universe, it will be found to have a length and breadth, a depth and height, that can never be explored.]

2. Because of the benefits conveyed by it—

[If he had only his own personal benefit in view, he could not but rejoice: for, what an amazing benefit is it for a guilty creature to say, "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, he also is become my salvation!" It is not possible for any one to have this sweet assurance, and not adopt the language of exultation actually used by the Church of old, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord: my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Indeed it is said of every believer, that "though he has not personally seen Christ, yet he cannot but rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." But doubtless he looked to the salvation of a ruined world: and what joy must not that excite! See in what raptures David was, at the prospect which was opened to him^a! See how, at the period of our Saviour's advent, every heart rejoiced! how Mary exclaimed, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!" how the embryo infant, of six months' existence only in the womb of Elizabeth, leaped for joy at the approach of the blessed Virgin, in whom the Saviour was but just formed^a! Hear, at the time of his nativity, with what ecstatic joy the angels proclaimed his advent, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord^b!" Hear how every person, to whose ears it was at all welcome, exulted in it! how Zacharias "blessed God;" and Simeon desired his dismissal from the body, accounting that he had attained all that was valuable in life, now that he had seen and embraced the infant Saviour^c! Behold, when salvation by Christ was proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, how all the converts forgot every personal concern, and spent all their time in blessing and praising God^d. So it was, wherever the glad tidings were proclaimed^e. No wonder then it was so with Abraham,

^a Isai. xii. 2.

^x Isai. lxi. 10.

^y 1 Pet. i. 8, 9

^z Ps. xcvi. Read, and quote, the whole psalm.

^a Luke i. 44.

^b Luke ii. 10, 11.

^c Luke ii. 27—32.

^d Acts ii. 44—47.

^e Acts viii. 8, 39.

when he heard, as it were, an universal *jubilee* proclaimed: his heart at least, if not his lips, gave vent to its feelings, in the expressive language of the prophet, "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel^f."]

We cannot conclude without INQUIRING, *What effect has the arrival of this day on you^g?*

[How many who live under the meridian light of the Gospel have never yet attained the knowledge nor the joy that Abraham possessed, though he lived two thousand years before the Lord Jesus came into the world! The greater part of those who bear the Christian name, even when commemorating the Saviour's advent, celebrate it only in a way of carnal feasting; thus making his being "manifested to take away our sins" an occasion of multiplying their transgressions against him. But woe be to those who so mock and insult the Saviour of the world: truly their mirth will have a very different issue from what they expect. I call upon you then to examine, what effect the contemplation of this mystery has produced on you? Has it filled you with admiration, and gratitude, and joy? and does this effect of it remain upon your mind from day to day? Tell me, if Abraham so exulted in it when he saw it only prospectively, and at the distance of two thousand years, should you view it with indifference, who are privileged to behold it in its meridian splendour? Methinks the frame predicted by the Prophet Isaiah, should be that of every soul amongst you: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation^h." My dear brethren, be not satisfied, if this be not your experience: be assured, you know nothing of the Saviour's love, nothing, at least, as you ought to know it, if it have not produced this effect upon you. If you be Abraham's children, you will "walk in the steps of your father Abraham," believing in Christ, and rejoicing in him; not indeed in the prospect of his advent in the flesh, but in the prospect of that day which is now fast approaching, when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be gathered to him, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God — — — You will also look forward to that day, when he will come again in the glory of his Father, and of all his holy angels, to judge the world—for ever to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."]

^f Isai. xliv. 23.

^g If this be preached on *Christmas-day*, it will admit of that application. But the true reference is to the *gospel-day*.

^h Isai. xxv. 9.

MDCLVIII.

THE NEED OF WORKING WHILST IT IS DAY.

John ix. 4. *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

IN the circumstances of mankind we behold an inequality, which, at first sight, appears strange and unaccountable. One is born possessed of all the faculties that can conduce to his welfare: another is brought into the world deformed in body, defective in intellect, and, on the whole, in a state scarcely superior to the brute creation. This must certainly, in the first instance, be traced to the sovereignty of God; who has a right to give to his creatures, or withhold from them, whatsoever he shall see fit. He has not injured us by making us inferior to the angels; nor does he injure any one, if he make him inferior to the beasts also. But, in these sovereign exercises of his will, he often has a special view to his own glory. Perhaps, at no period of the world did he ever give Satan liberty to exert his power over the bodies of men to so great an extent as during the time of our Lord's ministry upon earth. In this dispensation, he gave to the Lord an opportunity of displaying, to a greater degree than he could otherwise have done, his power over Satan and all his hosts. We know, from authority, that this was the reason of our Lord's not interposing to heal Lazarus, as soon as the application was made to him. In staying two whole days after he was informed of the dying state of Lazarus, he appeared regardless of the requests which had been sent to him by his much-loved friends, Mary and Martha. But he assigned as the reason of that delay, that, from the state of Lazarus, it was intended to bring glory both to God the Father, and to himself, as his Father's agent*. In like manner we are informed, that, for a similar end, a man was born into the world blind. A notion having obtained amongst the Jews, that there was a state of existence

* John xi. 3, 4, 14, 15.

previous to that which men now have on earth, and that they were either rewarded or punished in this world, according as they had conducted themselves in that from whence they had come; and that God also recompensed in men the good or evil that had been done by their parents; the Disciples asked our Lord, which of these two things had occasioned to the poor man this great calamity. Our Lord told them, that the calamity was not to be traced either to any evil that the man had committed in a pre-existent state, or to any that had been committed by his parents; but that it had been sent by God, for the furtherance of his own glory, in giving sight to the blind. It had been ordained of God, that the Messiah should evince the truth of his mission by opening the eyes of the blind: and the opening of this man's eyes was a work especially assigned to the Lord Jesus for that very end. Hence, instead of entering into a distinct consideration of the questions proposed to him, he contents himself with negating both alternatives, and with intimating, that he must address himself without delay to the work before him; the work of giving sight to this blind man.

But though the words of our text have a particular reference to our blessed Lord, they must not be confined to him; since they are equally applicable to every child of man, and declare to all of us,

I. Our duty—

We all have a great work to do—

[As far as our blessed Lord acted as a Mediator between God and man, his work was peculiar to himself: but, as far as he was engaged in "fulfilling all righteousness"^b, he was a pattern to us. He acted as his Father's servant, "sent"^c to perform a work: and we, in like manner, are servants of the Living God: only, being sinners, we have the duty of sinners; which Jesus, by reason of his innocence, could not have. As having offended Almighty God, our first duty is, to humble ourselves before him, and to seek for mercy at his hands. Our next duty is, to implore help from him, that we may be able to fulfil his will in future, and, by a holy life and conversation to

^b Matt. iii. 15.

^c Text, with John ix. 7.

advance to the uttermost the glory of his name: for "herein is our Father glorified, when we bring forth much fruit^d." This is the duty of *every* man, without exception. Men's duties, in reference to society, differ according to the rank and station which they hold: the prince and the peasant, the parent and the child, have different offices to perform: but towards God we all stand in the same relation; and all have to render the same services — — —]

For the performance of this work, we are "*sent*" into the world—

[We are not sent here to eat, and to drink, and to pass our time in pleasure; but to do the work assigned to us. Every moment of our time is given us for that purpose, and should be employed for that end. When we rise in the morning, we should inquire, What duties have I to perform this day? And, when we lie down again at night, we should inquire, how far we have executed the will of our heavenly Master. The performance of our work should supersede every thing else. Nothing should occupy our mind in comparison of it. To every one who would call us from our duty, we should reply with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" The conduct of Abraham's servant, when ordered to seek out from amongst the family of Abraham a wife for his son Isaac, will admirably illustrate our duty towards God. Having received his instructions relative to the conduct he should pursue, he implored of God his unerring guidance, that so he might be led to a successful issue. And when, by Divine Providence, he seemed to have attained his end, having been led to the very house of Abraham's own nephew, Bethuel, he was desired to refresh himself after his long journey. But what was his reply? It was truly memorable; and shewed how much he had at heart the execution of the trust committed to him: "There was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I WILL NOT EAT, UNTIL I HAVE TOLD MINE ERRAND^e." Here, we see, he preferred his duty "before his necessary food^f." This is exactly what we should do. Our blessed Lord has set us the example: and, like him, we should be able to say, "My meat is, to do the will of Him that sent me^h."]

With our duty, our blessed Lord sets forth also,

II. The urgency of it—

We have but a "day" to do it in—

^d John xv. 8.

^e Neh. vi. 3.

^f Gen. xxiv. 33.

^g Job xxiii. 12.

^h John iv. 34

[A day is given us; and that is little enough for so great a work: yet it is time enough, if duly and diligently improved. It is, however, of very uncertain continuance. The sun of many goes down at noon; and often without the slightest warning. Yea, scarcely is the sun risen with many, ere it sets. This is a truth known to all; but considered by few: else, how earnest should we be in doing the work assigned us. We should not be putting it off till "a more convenient season;" but should improve the present hour, "not knowing what a day or an hour may bring forth." We should "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time!"]

Our day being closed, our work is closed with it—

["There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave^k." "When the night is once come, we can work no more." Our good purposes, if not carried into effect before, will then fail, and our best resolutions prove abortive. If we have lived impenitent to that hour, or have only felt remorse, without carrying our sins to Jesus, and washing them in the fountain of his blood, we shall continue impenitent and unforgiven to all eternity. "As the tree falleth, so it will lie^l." We may then weep for our sins; but our tears will be unavailing: we may even "wail and gnash our teeth for anguish:" but the door of mercy will be closed. We may cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" but God will be deaf to our entreaties. We may even call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon us, and to hide us from the wrath of the Lamb: but they cannot perform for us that friendly office; nor can so much as a drop of water be obtained, to soothe the anguish of our bodies and our souls^m. We may then wish, 'O, that I had another day, or even another hour! how would I work then!' But our day is for ever closed; and nothing but everlasting "night" remains; even "the blackness of darkness for everⁿ."]]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are more advanced in years—

[Much of your day is obviously gone: and little, according to the course of nature, remains. Your glass is well nigh run down. Is it not then time for *you* to awake, and to begin the work which God has sent you to perform? Should *you* not be engaged in penitential sorrow for your past sins; in crying earnestly to Almighty God for mercy; in fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ as to the hope set before you? Should *you* not be seeking the renovation of your souls after the Divine image? Should *you* not be daily "preparing to meet

^l Eph. v. 15, 16.

^k Eccl. ix. 10.

^l Eccl. xi. 3.

^m Luke xvi. 24, 25.

ⁿ Jude, ver. 13.

your God" in judgment? Yes, indeed: but it is a sad and melancholy truth, that few who have advanced beyond the middle term of life impenitent, are brought to repentance afterwards. Their habits are fixed; their conceit of their own safety is become inveterate; and their very consciences, as far as it respects every thing but gross sin, are seared. I thank God, however, that there are instances of persons entering into the service of their God even at the tenth or eleventh hour! Let me entreat you, beloved brethren, to be of that happy number; that, when you come to die, you may be able to adopt the words of our blessed Lord, and say, "Father, I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do."]

2. Those who are yet in early life—

[It can never be too early for you to begin this necessary work. The lambs which were appointed to be offered unto God in sacrifice, every morning and evening throughout the year, were to be "of the first year:" and it is in the earliest period of your lives that you should "offer yourselves living sacrifices to the Lord." You will remember, that the first fruits of every thing were to be offered to God: and of the corn, they were to be of "full ears" indeed; for God must have every thing of the most perfect *kind*; but they were to be "green ears," green ears "dried by fire," and beaten out. And what can this import, but that, before you have attained that measure of maturity which is required for the service of man, you *may*, and *must*, be rendering service to your God? You have examples of this in Samuel, Obadiah, Timothy; and, above all, in our blessed Lord himself, who, at the age of twelve years, willingly devoted himself to his God and Father, in his temple. Let me prevail on you to follow these examples; and now, ere sin has hardened your hearts, and Satan has drawn you fully into his snares, to devote yourselves to God. And know, for your encouragement, that a special promise is given you of the Lord, "They that seek me early, shall find me."]

3. All of you without exception—

[Through the mercy of our God the day is yet continued to you; that day, which, within the last year, has closed on thousands, who, humanly speaking, were as likely to live as you. And, to multitudes of them, how dreary a night has commenced! and how thankful would they be, if they were permitted once more to hear the tidings of salvation which

° John xvii. 4.

° Lev. ii. 14.

° Exod. xxix. 38.

° Luke ii. 42, 49.

° Rom. xii. 1.

° Prov. viii. 17.

yet sound in your ears! Be thankful, I pray you, for this distinguishing grace which has been vouchsafed to you: and increase not your guilt by a further continuance in sin. What a fearful reflection will it be at a future period, that you lived but to "add sin to sin," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!" If you live to repent of it, what anguish of mind will you suffer, ere you obtain forgiveness! And, if you live not to repent of it, what infinitely sorer anguish will you sustain to all eternity! And why should you defer the work to which God is calling you? Suppose ye that it is a state of melancholy, that shall embitter the whole remainder of your days? No: "The work of righteousness is peace: and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever." Indeed you all know, in your hearts, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:" and that "*in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward*."]

^a Isai. xxxii. 17.

^x Ps. xix. 11.

MDCLIX.

THE BLIND MAN HEALED AT THE POOL OF SILOAM.

John ix. 6, 7. *When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

THERE is reason to think that all the miracles of our Lord were intended as emblems of the spiritual blessings which he came to bestow. But in interpreting Scripture it is better to assign to every passage a sense which is clear and determinate, than to wander into the regions of conjecture. In some places however the mystical meaning is pointed out by the inspired writers themselves; and then we may follow them without doubt or fear. Such is the case with respect to the miracle before us; in considering which it will be proper to notice,

I. The historical fact—

[The Disciples seeing a man that had been blind from his birth, inquired of our Lord whether the sins of his parents, or any sins of his own in a former state of existence^a, had been

^a It should seem that the Pythagorean notion of the transmigration of souls, prevailed among the Jews of that day.

the occasion of that calamity being inflicted on him? Our Lord informed them, that it was owing to a far different cause: that it had been ordained of God on purpose "that the works of God might be made manifest in him," and that in him the Messiah might be glorified. What a consoling thought is this to those who have endured long and heavy afflictions, that God perhaps has sent those afflictions *on purpose* to glorify the riches of his grace and love by means of them! Who would not submit to be reduced to the state of this blind beggar, in order to be made the honoured instrument of glorifying God, and the happy monument of his power and grace?

Our blessed Lord, determining to heal him, made clay of his own spittle, and put it on his eyes, and bade him wash in the pool of Siloam. How strange a remedy was this! In itself, it was more calculated to put out the eyes of one that could see, than to give sight to one that was blind. Whether the Lord Jesus intended by this act to shew, that men who are *born* blind are, as it were, still farther blinded by their intercourse with *this present world*, and that no power but his could remove this double veil from their eyes, I cannot say: but this is clear, that he did it, to shew, that he can work by *any* means, however inadequate; that we must submit to use the means which he prescribes; and that in the use of his instituted ordinances, of whatever kind they be, we may expect his blessings.

The man complied with the injunctions given him, and found the desired blessing. One would suppose that the sight of this stupendous miracle must have convinced all, that Jesus was the Messiah: but a determined infidel nothing will convince. The Pharisees were determined not to believe in Jesus: they therefore endeavoured at first to disprove the miracle. When that was established beyond a possibility of doubt, they made the performing of the miracle on the Sabbath-day a ground of accusation against Jesus, and cried out against it as a scandalous violation of the Sabbath. When they saw the conviction that was fastened on the minds of the more ingenuous, they enacted a law, that every one who should confess Jesus to be the Messiah, should be excommunicated. Such are the weapons with which ungodly men have ever combated the truth of God: when they fail in argument, they have recourse to authority, and establish that by pains and penalties, which they have in vain laboured to maintain by an appeal to reason or Scripture.

The parents of the man were intimidated and silenced; but the man that had received the benefit, boldly vindicated the character of his benefactor. His arguments were irresistible: but they served only to incense the haughty Pharisees, and to bring upon himself the sentence of excommunication. Thus will every truly enlightened man confess his Saviour; and, when

called to suffer for him, will take up his cross with cheerful resignation, yea, and rejoice that he is counted worthy to bear it.

Our blessed Lord soon found his faithful confessor, and amply rewarded his fidelity by a fuller manifestation of himself, and a more abundant communication of grace to his soul. And thus will he recompense all who suffer for his sake: they shall have a hundredfold now in this present life, and "in the world to come life everlasting^b."

Forbearing to notice the more minute incidents, we pass on to,

II. The typical interpretation—

We cannot conceive why the Evangelist should give the typical import of the word Siloam, unless to intimate, that the whole miracle had a typical reference. The word Siloam means, Sent; and was intended to prefigure the true "Shiloh^c," "the messenger of the covenant^d," the sent of God^e, the Messiah that should come into the world; and the miracle wrought there typically represents,

1. The state of mankind by nature—

[The man by the special providence of God was *born* blind, in order that he might more fitly characterize the state and condition of unregenerate men. They are universally blind by nature, and as blind with respect to spiritual things as this poor man was with respect to all the objects around him. He could form some crude notions about them by means of feeling; but he could discern no one thing aright: so the men of this world may, by reading, obtain some faint idea of spiritual things; but they have no just apprehension of them at all. To prove that all natural men are blind, we need not descend to particulars, or shew that they cannot discern this and that particular truth; there is one question that may determine the point at once; Do *all*, or do *any* of those who are in the broad road, see whither they are going? do they not universally think, or hope at least, that notwithstanding all which God has spoken^f, they shall go to heaven when they die? If further proof be wanted, let an appeal be made to Scripture, and God himself will put the matter beyond dispute^g. Nothing can more justly represent our state than the man on whom this miracle was wrought.]

^b Mark x. 29, 30.

^c Gen. xlix. 10.

^d Mal. iii. 1.

^e John x. 36.

^f Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^g Rev. iii. 16, 17. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. The end for which Christ came into the world—

[Our Lord himself gave this exposition to the miracle, at the very time he wrought it^h; and enforced it afterwards by more express declarations. He was not only to be a light to lighten the worldⁱ, but was to open the eyes of the blind^k. He was not only to set before men truths which they were unacquainted with before, but to open their hearts, that they might give attention to them^l, and their understandings, that they might understand them^m.

The very manner in which he imparts his blessings, is also not obscurely intimated in the miracle before us. As the means he used were very inadequate to the end proposed, so, for the advancement of his own glory, he uses the ministry of weak and sinful men, and by their word he turns men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto Godⁿ. Even supposing that we were able of ourselves to convince the judgments of men, we can no more give them spiritual discernment, than the clay and water could give organs of vision to the blind beggar. But, as an ordinance appointed by Jesus, and accompanied with his Spirit, our preaching is made instrumental to the enlightening and saving of many souls. And the weakness of the instruments used by him, is rendered subservient to his more abundant honour^o.]

Our blessed Lord has given us a yet further insight into the miracle, by suggesting to us,

III. The spiritual improvement—

[There was to be a judicial discrimination in the ministry of our Lord for the purpose of encouraging the humble, and confounding the proud^p. The great line of distinction between men is this; some are sensible of their blindness, and desire to be divinely enlightened; and others imagine that they already see, and therefore disregard all offers of spiritual illumination.

With respect to *the former*, Christ came to give them sight: and, if they will apply to him in the use of his appointed ordinances, he will assuredly vouchsafe to them the benefit they desire. He declares that this was the very intent of his coming into the world^q: and he counsels all to apply to him for the eye-salve that shall effectually remedy their wants^r. If they do this, their want of education, or even weakness of intellect, shall be no obstacle in their way; he will “reveal to babes and sucklings the things which are hid from the wise and prudent^s.”

^h ver. 5.

ⁱ Acts xvi. 14.

^j 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^k Rev. iii. 18.

^l Luke ii. 32.

^m Luke xxiv. 45.

ⁿ ver. 39.

^o Matt. xi. 25.

^p Isai. xlii. 6, 7.

^q Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

^r Luke iv. 18.

With respect to *the latter*, he will leave them to the operation of their own minds, and give them up to their own delusions. He will not actively mislead them; nor is there any need that he should in order to produce the increase of blindness in them: for if left to themselves, they will bewilder themselves in their own reasonings, and confirm themselves more and more in their own errors. Their prejudices, their passions, and their interests, will concur to lead them astray, and their great adversary the devil, will obstruct the entrance of light into their minds[†]; and thus they will eventually be “taken in their own craftiness[‡],” and “utterly perish in their own corruptions[×].”

The improvement then which our Lord himself teaches us to make of this miracle is, to cultivate a sense of our own blindness, and to “become fools in order that we may be wise[†].” If we be “wise in our own conceits, there is more hope of a fool[‡],” or of any other character in the universe, than of us. On the contrary, if we be deeply humbled before God as destitute of all spiritual discernment, the “scales shall soon be made to fall from our eyes,” and the “Spirit of the living God will guide us into all truth.”]

ADDRESS—

[All of us must of necessity resemble the man while his blindness continued, or after it had been removed. Let us then inquire whether we can say with him, “This I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see[†]?” If we cannot, let us remember, that the Saviour is nigh at hand, and that the means used for our illumination, weak as they are, are quite sufficient, if accompanied with his power. Let us take encouragement to ask the influences of his good Spirit, and to pray with David, “Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law[‡].” On the other hand, if our eyes have been opened, let us boldly confess our benefactor, and willingly bear whatever infidel rulers or persecuting bigots may inflict upon us for his sake. Let us, like Christ himself, endure the cross, and despise the shame. Let us “be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life.”]

† 2 Cor. iv. 4.

‡ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

• Ps. cxix. 18.

▪ 1 Cor. iii. 19.

▪ Prov. xxvi. 12.

× 2 Pet. ii. 12.

• ver. 25.

MDCLX.

DISPOSITION TO BE EXERCISED TOWARDS THE GOSPEL.

John ix. 35—38. *Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

NO man that ever suffered for righteousness' sake found, in the issue, that he had any reason to complain: for, sooner or later, God has recompensed his sufferings into his bosom a hundred-fold, even in this present life: and assuredly a most glorious recompence awaits him in the world to come*. A remarkable instance of God's special favour to his suffering people is recorded in the passage before us. A man, who had been born blind, had been restored to sight. The Pharisees, being averse to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, would not believe that the miracle had been wrought: but, being compelled at last to acknowledge that, they persisted that Jesus, in working this miracle on the Sabbath-day, had violated the Sabbath, and unequivocally proved himself to be a sinner. But the man, on whom the miracle had been wrought, very justly observed to them, that God would never have set his seal, in so public and wonderful a manner, to the pretensions of an impostor; and that, consequently, the miracle must be considered as a decisive proof that Jesus was both sent of God, and approved of God. The Pharisees, unable to withstand the force of his reasoning, had recourse to persecution, and "cast him out of the synagogue." But his fidelity did not long remain unnoticed or unrewarded: for our blessed Lord soon found him, and poured into his soul all the blessings of salvation.

In considering the case of this blind man, I propose to notice,

* Mark x. 29, 30.

I. The disposition exercised by him—

We cannot but observe, that, to the question put to him by our Lord, there was something very remarkable in his reply: "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" Now,

In this he manifested a singular degree of candour—

[The question, as applied to him, might appear almost unreasonable: for he had been blind from his birth; and therefore had been cut off, in a measure, from many sources of information which were open to persons of his own age and rank in society. It is true, that the Messiah was generally expected among his countrymen, and that he was expected as "the Son of God:" but, from the obstacles which had obstructed his enjoyment of social converse, it could scarcely be hoped that he had collected much information on the subject: and, as for the benefit arising from ocular testimony, he was altogether, by his blindness, precluded from it. Yet, no complaint was made by him on these grounds, nor any excuse offered for his own ignorance; but a desire was expressed to obtain information, and a willingness was declared to act upon it. The excellence of this disposition will best appear, by contrasting it with others which are generally exercised on similar occasions.

Contrast it with *prejudice*; of which the Pharisees exhibited a striking example on this occasion. They could not deny that the miracle had been wrought: yet they were not at all the more disposed to receive the testimony of Jesus. As those, who saw that devils were cast out by him, would rather account for it by a supposed confederacy with the prince of the devils, than confess the Messiahship of Jesus^b; and, as those who saw Lazarus after his restoration to life plotted to kill him, lest the sight of him should fasten conviction on the minds of any, and induce them to believe in Jesus; so, in the passage before us, the Pharisees determined to resist all evidence, however strong, and to reject the Saviour, whatever proofs he might give of his Divine mission^c. But against such perverseness, the man, of whom my text speaks, bore, both in word and deed, a most decisive testimony.

Contrast it with *indifference*; of which we have a deplorable instance in Pilate. Our Lord had told him plainly, "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice." On

Matt. ix. 34.

^c John xii. 10, 11.

hearing this, Pilate asked, "What is truth^d?" But he waited not for an answer; and thereby discovered that he had no desire to be informed. Not so the man before us: he really wished to be informed, that he might conduct himself as it became him towards the person after whom he inquired.

Contrast it with *scepticism*. Of the great mass of the Jews who had followed Jesus, it is said, that, "though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him^e." Not contented with such miracles as he saw fit to work, and which left no room for doubt, they would have signs of their own choosing^f. Even Thomas, one of his own Disciples, (when he had the fullest testimony of all the other Apostles, who had themselves been by no means forward to believe, and had yielded only to evidence that was irresistible,) declared, that, unless he should put his fingers into the very print of the nails in his Saviour's hands, and thrust his hand into his side, he would not believe^g. This was decidedly wrong. We are bound to yield to evidence, provided that evidence be sufficient to convince us on ordinary occasions: and a readiness to act upon the testimony of him who had opened his eyes was a very commendable trait in the character before us.

Contrast it, lastly, with *credulity*. This is an error on the contrary side; but extremely common, when falsehood is proposed for our belief. In every age, the Jews were prone to it. Whatever impostor arose, professing himself to be the Christ, he was sure enough to find many followers. He needed only to "come in his own name," and very little would suffice to satisfy the minds of the deluded multitude^h. Against this we should be on our guard, no less than against excessive incredulity: for St. John says, "Believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they are of Godⁱ." But of this there was no trace in the spirit of this man: for, though he expressed a readiness to believe, he had abundant reason to rely on the testimony of Him who had so miraculously opened his eyes: in him, therefore, this readiness was not credulity, but piety.]

This is the precise disposition which becomes us all—

[In a matter purely speculative, the mind should have no bias at all; no leaning towards one side of the question, any more than towards the other. But the Gospel is not a speculative doctrine; nor are we in a condition to speculate upon it. We have an interest in believing it: and we act most irrationally if we do not feel a wish that the evidences for it may be found true. We are sinners; and, as sinners, under the

^d John xviii. 38.

^e John xx. 25.

^f John xii. 37.

^g John v. 43.

^h Matt. xii. 38, 39.

ⁱ 1 John iv. 1.

displeasure of Almighty God. The Gospel purports to be a revelation from heaven, declaring a way for our reconciliation with God. It announces to us a Saviour, even the only-begotten Son of God, as becoming incarnate, and dying upon the cross for our sins; that, through Him, all that believe may be justified from all the sins that ever they have committed. Will any one then say, that we ought not to wish this revelation to be true? or is it a subject on which we ought to speculate, as if we had no interest whatever in it? If a number of rebels, under sentence of death, were informed that the king had sent a free pardon to them, would it become them to receive the tidings with perfect indifference, and to amuse themselves with abstract speculations about the nature and degrees of evidence, without any concern about the proffered benefit? No man would for a moment approve of such apathy; no man would blame a wish to ascertain the truth of such a report, or a readiness to credit it on sufficient evidence. And precisely in that situation do we stand; and such should be the disposition of our minds towards the Gospel of Christ.]

To this we are greatly encouraged by,

II. The benefit he derived from it—

Two things we behold, as immediately resulting from it:

1. Christ's manifestation of himself to him—

[To no one, except the Samaritan woman, did our Lord so frankly and so fully declare his own Messiahship, as to this man. To her, upon her saying, "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when He is come, he will tell us all things;" he plainly replied, "I, that speak unto thee am He^k." So, to this persecuted man he also, with the same frankness, proclaimed his divine mission: "Dost thou ask who the Son of God is? Thou hast both seen him; and he it is that talketh with thee." I say not but that, on some occasions, both to his Disciples and to Pilate, he *acknowledged* himself to be the Messiah: but to no person did he give so direct, and full, and positive an assurance, as to these two most favoured people: to the woman, in order to shew, to all future generations, that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound^l:" and to the man, that he might encourage all to take up their cross boldly, and follow him.

But does this instance encourage any hope in us? Yes, assuredly it does: for, if we really desire to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and to cleave unto him, "he will come to us, and manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world."

^k John iv. 25, 26.

^l Rom. v. 20.

And to those who questioned his doctrines, he said, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself^m:" so, to those who would approve themselves to him, he says, "If a man love me, my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with himⁿ." A docility of mind, and a readiness to follow the dictates of an enlightened conscience, are the distinguishing features of "an Israelite indeed," and shall never fail of being honoured with testimonies of his special approbation^o.]

2. His dedication of himself to Christ—

[No sooner did the Lord Jesus profess himself to be the Messiah, than this man acknowledged him under that character, and paid him that "worship" which was due to him as God's only dear Son.

Now, whence had he power to do this? Was not this faith the gift of God^p? And was not this act of adoration the fruit of the Spirit, even of the Holy Ghost "working mightily in him" as "a Spirit of grace and of supplication^q?" Yes: the Lord Jesus, who had restored the organs of vision to his body, "gave light also to his soul," and enabled him to exercise these sublime graces: for we know, assuredly, that "without Christ he could have done nothing^r."

And will He not do as much for us, if we manifest the same child-like spirit? He will: he will remove all doubts from our minds, and enable us to exclaim, with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

And here let me observe, that our Lord did not decline these expressions of his adoring love. When such were offered by Cornelius to Peter^s, and by John to an angel^t, they were rejected instantly, as an invasion of the divine prerogative: but to Jesus they were properly offered, because he was the Son of God; and therefore he accepted them; and has thereby taught us, that all men are to "honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; and that he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent him^u."

Behold then, I say, the rewards conferred upon the disposition that was exercised. In an instant, as it were, this man was brought "from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Let me, in CONCLUSION,

^m John vii. 17.

ⁿ John xiv. 23.

^o John i. 47.

^p Acts xviii. 27. Phil. i. 29.

^q Zech. xii. 10. with John vi. 44.

^r John xv. 5.

^s Acts x. 25, 26.

^t Rev. xxii. 9.

^u John v. 23.

1. Propose to you the *inquiry*—

[To every individual amongst you would I propose the question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And let no one imagine, that it is an unnecessary inquiry. This man had argued well on the subject of evidences, and yet needed to have the question put to him. And many amongst ourselves may be able to defend the outworks of Christianity, whilst yet they have no personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. If we would determine this point aright, let us see how this man acted: the very instant that he was enabled to say with truth, "Lord, I believe," he fell down and "worshipped" his heavenly Benefactor. And will not true faith produce the same effect on us? Shall not we feel delight in prostrating ourselves at the Saviour's feet, and in acknowledging our obligations to him? Beyond a doubt, this effect *must* and *will* follow. Ask then yourselves, whether this be the habit of your minds from day to day? Has it been so this very day? Has it been so during the past week? Is there in your souls such an overwhelming sense of gratitude to him, as constrains you to revert to him, and fix your thoughts on him, as soon as ever the occasions which have caused a momentary diversion have passed away? Are you touched, as it were, with a magnetic power, that draws you to him, as the needle to the pole? This, I say again, is the invariable effect of true faith; and the resolution of this question will furnish you with the true answer to the inquiry in the text.]

2. Commend to you the *example*—

[In reference to every part of God's word should the same disposition be exercised. I say not, that an attentive examination of evidences is not good: for we are bound to "prove all things, and then to hold fast that only which is good^{*}." But a critical *spirit*, a disputatious *spirit*, a sceptical *spirit*, are not favourable to the reception of *divine* truth. They may be proper enough in reference to things which are purely intellectual; but not so in reference to things which are altogether spiritual. For a just discernment of *these* things we need the teachings of God's Holy Spirit[†]: and with childlike simplicity of mind we should ever pray with Job, "What I see not, teach thou me[‡];" and with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law[§]." Were *such* a spirit exercised by us, we should find, in ten thousand instances, that the difficulties of Scripture would vanish; what was "crooked becoming straight, and what was rough, being smoothed to a plain." An obediential spirit would

* 1 Thess. v. 21.

‡ Job xxxiv. 32.

† 1 Cor. ii. 14.

§ Ps. cxix. 18.

make the whole book of God both luminous and easy to be received. Let me then recommend, that you regard the sacred volume as "a mould, into which your soul is to be poured^b," and by which its every feature must be formed. Be ready to "obey it from the heart;" and it shall be as effectual to create your souls anew, as the command of heaven was to bring forth the universe into existence, and to reduce the chaos to that order and beauty which entitled it to the commendation of Jehovah, as "very good^c." In a word, cultivate the spirit which displayed itself so eminently in this man; and, with a readiness to receive instruction and embrace the truth, let there be in you a determination of heart to follow your convictions, without hesitation and without reserve.]

^b Rom. vi. 17. the Greek. ^c John xv. 3. with Gen. i. 3, 31.

MDCLXI.

DISCRIMINATING EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL.

John ix. 39. *Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they who see might be made blind.*

THE miracles of our blessed Lord were, as is well known, testimonies from God to his divine mission. But they were also intended as emblems of that spiritual work which he was sent to accomplish. In the former view, he appealed to them for the conviction of John the Baptist, and of those who had been sent by John to inquire respecting his Messiahship: "Go, and shew John those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up: and blessed is he who shall not be offended in me^a." In the latter view, he refers to them in the passage before us. He had healed a man who was born blind. This having been done on the Sabbath-day, his obstinate and unbelieving enemies imputed it to him as a crime, rather than as any proof of his Messiahship: but the man who was healed, knowing that "no man could do such miracles unless God were with him," believed in Jesus, and confessed him openly as the Saviour of the world. From

^a Matt. xi. 4—6.

the division thus caused, our Lord took occasion to declare, in reference to the souls of men, the intent, and certain effect, of his advent: "For judgment am I come into this world; that they who see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind."

The true import of this passage will not be seen by a superficial observer. It needs much consideration: but it will amply repay all the labour which we can bestow in the investigation of it.

To assist you in apprehending it aright, I will shew,

I. The need there was of Christ for the developing and disclosing the characters of men—

The judgment which was universally formed of men's characters was extremely erroneous—

[Men had no other test, whereby to try the human character, than that of moral virtue. If a person had such a respect for the Supreme Being as to be observant of external duties towards him, and such a disposition towards his fellow-creatures as prompted him to acts of benevolence towards them, he was approved, and regarded as a pattern of all that was good. Hence it was that the Scribes and Pharisees were held in such high esteem. Humility, as a grace, was not inquired after; nor indeed was it at all necessary to the discharge of those offices which alone were deemed obligatory in the service of God. On the contrary, the fulfilment of religious duties was considered as a just ground for self-admiration and self-applause. Such men, indeed, as David, who were inspired of God, had the same ideas of it as we have: but, as among the Greeks and Romans, so also amongst the Jews themselves, it was rather reckoned as a mean and base feeling, than as the summit of human excellence. Nor, if it had entered into the composition of virtue in their minds, were there any means of discovering its existence. The submission of human wisdom to that which is divine was not called for to any great extent: nor was a renunciation of a man's own righteousness demanded, in order to his acceptance through a righteousness provided for him by God. General obedience to acknowledged laws constituted the chief excellence of every man; and beyond that nothing was looked for, in order to secure the approbation of God. But all this was erroneous: yea, in relation to it all, it may be said, that "that which was highly esteemed amongst men was an abomination in the sight of God^b."]]

^b Luke xvi. 15.

Hence arose a necessity for our blessed Lord to come into the world—

[Doubtless, the first ground of his advent was to make reconciliation for the sins of men, and to work out a righteousness for them by his own obedience unto death. But subordinate to this was the purpose specified in our text: "For judgment came I into this world." To understand this expression aright, we must call to mind the office of a Judge. He inquires into the particular facts which are brought before him, and determines the characters of men according to those facts. Now, what an earthly judge does in reference to *overt acts*, that the Lord Jesus Christ does in reference to *secret dispositions*. He brings with him a revelation calculated to elicit the dispositions of the heart, and to shew what men really are in the sight of God. Hence, at the time when his parents brought him to the temple, to do for him after the custom of the law, it was said concerning him, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against, *that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*."]

But I will proceed to mark more distinctly,

II. The suitableness of his appearance to produce that discovery—

The whole of his appearance, from the first to the latest hour of his *existence* upon earth, was calculated to offend the pride of man—

[See him at *his birth*. Behold him born in the family of a poor carpenter; and laid in a manger, because there was no better accommodation for his mother, under circumstances which, it might have been supposed, would have called forth sympathy and liberality from ten thousand bosoms. Is this the Son of God? Impossible: it can never be, that Almighty God should suffer him to come into the world under circumstances of such unparalleled degradation.

See him, too, in *his life*. Behold him still so poor, as not to have a place where to lay his head: a few poor fishermen for his followers; and an object of scorn and derision to all the higher parts of the community. Were I to give a just description of him, I could not do it in more appropriate terms than in those of prophecy itself: "He shall be as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness: and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows

† Luke ii. 34, 35.

and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not^a." Yet this is the person who offers himself to me as the Saviour of the world!

See him, finally, in *his death*. This completes the scene. He is sentenced to death, both by the men of his own nation and by the Roman governor; and, by universal consent, is executed as a malefactor; a murderer being preferred before him, as a fitter object of mercy than he. And is *He* to save me, when he did not save himself? Is *He* to deliver me from the wrath of *God*, who himself fell under the wrath of *man*? I wonder not that such an idea was a ground of offence; for throughout the whole there was an apparent inconsistency with all his own professions, and an absolute contrariety to all the expectations that were formed concerning him. Is this the person that came from God, and "made himself equal with God," and through whom alone any child of man can come to God, or find acceptance with him? Unenlightened reason discards at once such pretensions as these, and rejects them utterly as irrational and absurd. And this is exactly what the prophet has foretold: "*He, the Lord Jesus, shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.*"

On the other hand, he gave sufficient evidence of his Messiahship to convince any humble inquirer—

[The testimony borne to him by angels at his birth, the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him at his baptism, the numberless miracles wrought by him in his life, the wonders attendant on his death, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven, his sending of the Holy Ghost on his Disciples, and all the miracles wrought by them in his name, *these* were evidences which an humble mind could not withstand. Besides, to those who felt their need of a Saviour, there was every thing which was suited to their necessities. A mere *man* would not have sufficed for them: they needed a Saviour who was God as well as man: they needed an atonement of infinite value; a righteousness fully adequate to all the demands of God's holy law, and capable of being imputed to them for their acceptance before God. They needed not only the sacrifice of Christ on earth, but also his intercession in heaven; yea, and his all-powerful agency, too, as the Head of vital influence to his Church and people: in a word, they needed precisely such

^a Isai. liii. 2, 8.

^b Isai. viii. 14, 15.

a Saviour as he had represented himself to be: and, though the whole relating to him was involved in mystery which they could not comprehend, they saw in it nothing but what was honourable to the character of God, and nothing but what was conducive to the happiness of man. Hence they were content to receive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, and to found all their hopes of happiness on him alone.

Thus in him was found precisely such a test as the world needed: and]

The use of this test was seen in,

III. The actual effect of his advent—

Mark the effect of his advent:

1. Whilst he himself was on earth—

[This discrimination of character was seen from the first moment that he entered on his ministry. Never did more gracious words proceed from the lips of man, than those which were uttered by him in his first public discourse at Nazareth; insomuch, that "all who heard them bare him witness, and wondered:" yet, upon his reminding them of two events in their history, the sending of the Prophet Elijah to be supported by a Sidonian (a heathen), and not an Israelitish widow; and the healing of a leprosy, by the Prophet Elisha, in the person of Naaman, a Syrian, and not of any of the lepers that were in Israel; they were instantly fired with such indignation and wrath, that "they thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong," and destroy him^s. Now, what was there in his discourse to produce so instantaneous a change? The Jews considered themselves as exclusively the objects of God's regard; and they could not endure the thought that he should have mercy in reserve for the Gentiles: and the suggestion of this was in their minds an evil worthy of death. Again: when our blessed Lord wrought miracles in confirmation of his word, many, instead of yielding to conviction, took occasion, from the very works which they could not but acknowledge to be miraculous, to accuse him of a confederacy with the devil: and, in the very passage before us, they made his restoring a man to sight on the Sabbath-day a ground rather of accusation against him, as a sinner, than of acknowledging him to be, what he really was, the true Messiah. And to his latest hour they evinced the same spirit, calling out for a sentence of death against him; when his very Judge declared him innocent, and not a person upon earth could be found to convict him of the slightest sin. Nor was it

^f Luke iv. 18—22.

^s Luke iv. 25—29.

the mere populace who thus persecuted him: *they* were only instruments in the hands of their superiors: it was the act of the Scribes and Pharisees, and of all who presided in their nation, whether in the Ecclesiastical or Civil department: and this shewed how, by his ministry, their hypocrisy was detected: and that, in the midst of all their pretended piety, they were decided enemies to God in their hearts.]

2. In the whole of the apostolic age—

[The preaching of his name was productive of the very same effect as his personal ministry had produced. It was universally “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness^h.” If we except the instance of the Saviour himself, there never existed, from the foundation of the world, such a contest as that which was maintained by the Apostle Paul; *he* doing every thing that man could do, and suffering every thing that man could suffer, for the salvation of a perishing world; and *they*, whether Jews or Gentiles, uniformly and universally seeking his destruction. The same treatment was shewn to all the Apostles, and to all the followers of Christ, in proportion as they, by their activity and zeal, drew the attention of those to whom they ministered; insomuch that, with the exception of John, not one of the Apostles was suffered to die a natural death.

On the other hand, there were many to whom the mystery of the Gospel was “the wisdom of God and the power of Godⁱ.” In all its provisions they beheld an excellency and glory: and they found, by experience, that it was “the power of God to the salvation of their souls^k.” And who were they that thus displayed its energy? Were they the great, the wise, the moral? No: “ye see your calling,” says St. Paul, “how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence^l,” so fully did the Gospel answer the end predicted by the prophet; “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed^m.”]

^h 1 Cor. i. 23.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 24.

^k Rom. i. 16.

^l 1 Cor. i. 26—29. ^m Isai. vi. 9, 10.

3. At the present hour—

[No where is Christ faithfully preached, but “a division” is made among the people: and in all the families where his truth prevails, “a sword” is introduced, even amongst the nearest and dearest relatives^a. No caution in the preacher will suffice to abate the enmity of the heart against God. Only let Christ be exalted, and some will call the preacher an enthusiast and deceiver, whilst others will “regard him as an angel of God, or even as Christ Jesus himself^b.” The very same word is still, as in the days of old, “a savour of life to the salvation of some, and a savour of death to the condemnation of others^c.” And so far are the admired characters of the world from being most favourable to the truth, that even “publicans and harlots enter into heaven before them:” so true is it still, as in the days of old, that “the last are first, and the first last.”]

And now let me ADDRESS myself,

1. To those who are unconscious of their own blindness—

[This was the state of the Pharisees, to whom our Lord addressed the words of my text. Perceiving that he had in his mind a reference to them, they confidently and indignantly asked, “Are we blind also?” But our blessed Lord told them that their conceit only tended to enhance and aggravate their guilt. If they had, indeed, never been favoured with means of instruction, they would have had the less to answer for: but, in proportion as they supposed themselves already informed, they shewed their impiety in rejecting him^d. Now this is the very caution which I would give to you: The more confident you are that you are already in possession of the truth, the more you make it manifest that “Satan hath blinded your eyes:” for to make you reject Christ, is the work in which that subtle adversary is incessantly engaged^e. O! learn this humiliating truth, that you “are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;” and you will then have no difficulty in discovering the excellency of Christ, who offers to you “gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and eye-salve, that you may see; and raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear^f.” Only resemble the man who was willing and desirous to believe, and Christ will soon make himself known to you, in all his excellency, and in all his glory^g.]

^a Matt. x. 34—36. and Luke xii. 51—53. ^b Gal. iv. 14, 15.

^c 2 Cor. ii. 16. ^d ver. 40, 41. ^e 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.

^f Rev. iii. 18. ^g ver. 35—38.

2. To those who are willing to be taught of God—

[The docility of a little child is one of the choicest gifts that can possibly be bestowed upon you. It is a certain prelude to divine instruction, and the best preparative for all the blessings of the Gospel. You need not be discouraged at the thought of your own weakness: for "what God has hid from the wise and prudent, it is his delight to reveal to babes".^a "The wise he will leave to be taken in their own craftiness":^x but the more you are "a fool" in your own estimation, the more certainly and effectually shall you be made truly wise.⁷ The Holy Spirit is promised to you, as "a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ":^z and though the Gospel must ever remain to you an unfathomable mystery, you shall have such an insight into it as no unenlightened man can have^a, and by means of it be "guided safely into the way of peace."]]

^a Matt. xi. 25, 26.^x Isai. xxix. 14. with 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.⁷ 1 Cor. iii. 18—20.^z Eph. i. 17, 18.^a Matt. xiii. 11.

MDCLXII.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

John x. 9. *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*

THE importance of sound doctrine cannot be too strongly insisted on. Error, especially in the fundamentals of religion, is as destructive as vice. In innumerable instances, it brings both those who propagate, and those who receive it, into eternal ruin: hence St. Paul denounced anathemas against any one, even though he should be an angel from heaven, who should blend Judaism with Christianity. Our Lord himself also spake of false teachers with indignation. The Pharisees, while they rejected him, taught the people to look for salvation to their own ritual or superstitious observances; Jesus therefore declared them to be only as "thieves and robbers," who, instead of belonging to the flock of God, sought eventually their destruction, and, in opposition to their false doctrines, affirmed^a himself to be the only door of admission into the fold of God.

^a The affirmation is exceeding strong, ver. 7. and it is repeated in the text.

We shall consider,

I. The metaphor by which Jesus represents his own character—

He had been delivering “the parable” of “the Good Shepherd^b,” in elucidating which, he speaks of himself as “the door of the sheepfold.”

The Church of God is here compared to a sheep-fold—

[All men in their natural state are wandering at a distance from God^a: they neither acknowledge him as their Shepherd, nor feed in his pastures; they are strangers to that flock which is under his immediate care^d. But in every age God has had “a chosen and peculiar people:” in the days of Moses he brought them into a visible fold; till the time of Christ all his sheep were kept within the pale of the Jewish Church. But our Lord announced his purpose to introduce the Gentiles also into his fold^e. Now all who name the name of Christ are called his sheep. All however who are nominally his, are not *really* so^f. It is to be feared that his sincere followers still form but “a little flock;” but the truly upright, of whatever denomination they be, belong to him: they are indeed often ready to cast out each other as aliens; nevertheless they are equally the objects of his superintending care.]

Of this fold Christ is “the door”—

[Parts of Judæa were probably still infested with wolves: the sheepfolds therefore were better secured than ours: perhaps the entrance into them was guarded by a door. Now, what that door was to the fold, that is Christ to the Church: every sheep must enter into it by faith in him^g. We are expressly said to have access unto God through him^h; nor indeed has there ever been any other way into the foldⁱ. It was the blood of the sacrifice which procured admission for the high-priest within the vail^k. Through that, all believers, from the very beginning, were brought nigh to God^l; and, through that, we also have boldness to enter into the holiest^m. Some, it is true, have “climbed up into the fold some other wayⁿ.” they profess to be his without having ever believed in him; but they are regarded by him only as thieves and robbers; nor will they ever be admitted into the fold above.]

^b ver. 6, 11.

^c ver. 16.

^d Gal. iii. 26.

^e Heb. ix. 7, 25.

^f Heb. x. 19, 20.

^g Isai. liii. 6.

^h Rom. ii. 28. and ix. 6.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 18.

^j Rev. xiii. 8. with Eph. ii. 1⁸

^k ver. 1.

^l Eph. ii. 12.

^m John xiv. 6.

This description of Christ is of great importance.

II. The benefit of receiving him under that character—

There is no benefit which can accrue to a well-attended flock, which does not arise to those who believe in Christ—

1. Security; “He shall be saved”—

[Protection is of unspeakable benefit to a defenceless sheep: but who can estimate the value of salvation to an immortal soul? Yet, such is the portion of those who enter into the fold aright: they shall be rescued out of the jaws of the devouring lion^o: they shall be freed from the curse and condemnation of the law^p: death itself, disarmed of its sting, shall have no power to hurt them^q: every kind and degree of penal evil shall be averted from them. He that is empowered, is also engaged, to “save them to the uttermost:” and this benefit he bestows, because they “come unto God by him^r.”]

2. Liberty; “He shall go in and out”—

[A sheep left to wander on the mountains infested with wolves, might boast of its freedom from restraint; but it would soon find what little reason there was to glory in such a privilege: its truest liberty is to submit itself to the direction of the shepherd. Thus they, who live without God in the world, may boast of their liberty; but their very freedom is, in fact, the sorest bondage:^s and every moment they are in danger of everlasting destruction^t. It is far otherwise with those who have entered into the fold by Christ. Whether at large by day, or enclosed by night, they feel no restraint. Through Christ they have all the liberty which their souls can desire^u. Secure of God’s favour, “*they go in and out*” before him in perfect peace^x.]

3. Provision; “He shall find pasture”—

[Good pasture comprises all the wants of a highly favoured flock: and how rich, how abundant is that, which the sheep of Christ partake of! There are “exceeding great and precious promises,” on which they feed. It is utterly their own fault if ever they experience a dearth^v. David from his personal knowledge attests this truth^w; and God confirms it

^o 2 Tim. ii. 26. 1 Pet. v. 8.

^q 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. ^p Heb. vii. 25.

^r Ps. vii. 12, 13. Deut. xxxii. 35.

^s Ps. xxv. 13.

^t Ps. xxiii. 2.

^u Rom. viii. 1.

^v 2 Pet. ii. 19.

^w John viii. 36.

^x Ps. xxii. 26.

by an express promise to all his people^a. This privilege too, no less than the others, is the consequence of entering into the fold by the appointed door^b.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are wandering at a distance from the fold—

[Perhaps, like the silly sheep, you are insensible of your danger; but the more confident you are of safety, the more certain is your ruin. If they only, who enter in by the door, are saved, what can you expect? O consider, that the loss of bodily life, is not to be compared with the doom that awaits you; nor do you know how soon that doom may be inflicted upon you. Blessed be God, however, the door is yet open to all who come, and the Saviour's declaration is yet sounding in your ears^c— He is even now desirous to bring you home on his shoulders rejoicing^d. Stay not then till the door be forever closed upon you. Let the caution given by our Lord stir you up to improve the present moment^e.—]

2. Those who are desirous of returning to God—

[It has been already shewn, that they only are saved who enter in at the door. Now our proud hearts are extremely averse to be saved in this way. We would rather come into the fold by some less humiliating means. But our self-righteous attempts will be of no avail. We must come unto God by Christ, or not at all: salvation never was, nor can be, obtained through any other name than his^f. Seek then, and that with earnestness, to enter in at the strait gate^g, and then you shall have that promise fulfilled to you^h.—]

3. Those who are dwelling in the fold of God—

[What debtors are ye to the grace which brought you to the knowledge of Christ! and what inestimable blessings are you now made to enjoy! Yet these are only an earnest of the blessings that await you hereafter. Rich as your present pastures are, they are not to be compared with those above. Let nothing tempt you then to wander from the fold to which you are brought. Follow not those who are but "goats," or "wolves in sheep's clothing." Let it be your delight to hear your Shepherd's voice, and to follow his steps: then shall you be separated from the goats in the day of judgmentⁱ, and receive from the Chief Shepherd the portion reserved for you^k.]

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 14.

^d Luke xv. 4—6.

^g Luke xiii. 24.

^k 1 Pet. v. 4.

^b John vi. 35.

^e Luke xiii. 25.

^h Isai. xlv. 17.

^c John vi. 37.

^f Acts iv. 12.

ⁱ Matt. xxv. 33.

MDCLXIII.

LIFE ABUNDANTLY BY CHRIST.

John x. 10. *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

THE parables of our blessed Lord, though exceedingly clear and striking, lose much of their force by reason of the difference of our habits from those which obtained amongst the Jews. For instance, the office of a shepherd, though simple in itself, was widely different in Canaan from that which men are called to discharge in our land. In Canaan, where there were beasts of prey, it was attended with danger; and a man was often called to expose his own life for the protection of his flock. Such was the office which Christ undertook for us: only, instead of endangering his own life for the preservation of ours, he actually laid down his life, in order that we might obtain life. He was "the Good Shepherd, who gave his own life for the sheep;" and who "came, not only that we might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly."

To elucidate these words, I will shew,

I. The gracious purpose of our Lord's advent—

"He came that we might have life."

We could not, by any means, obtain it for ourselves—

[We were in the state of the fallen angels, so far as respects both guilt and condemnation; and were as incapable of removing these, and of restoring ourselves to the Divine favour, as they — — —]

But Christ came in order that we might be restored to the possession of it—

[He came in order to purchase life for us, and to impart it to us; to purchase it by his blood — — — and to impart it to us by his Spirit — — — And this he has effected, so far, that every one who believes in him has actually a title to life, and the very beginning of it in his soul — — —]

• ver. 11.

But the text leads us further to consider,

II. The extent to which he has accomplished it—

“He has come, that we might have life more abundantly.” And, the very instant we believe in him, we have life,

1. With more abundant evidence than was enjoyed under the Mosaic dispensation—

[The promises given to the Jews were mostly temporal. It is surprising how little is spoken of eternal life in the Old Testament, and especially of the resurrection of the body to a participation of it. And the access which men had to God was very distant. No one could offer sacrifice, except through the instrumentality of the priest; nor could any one but the High Priest go into the holy of holies; and he only on one day in the year; nor could even he go then, without the blood of his sacrifice. But the Lord Jesus Christ has “opened a way for us, a new and living way, into the holiest of all,” with his own blood; and, the veil, having been rent in twain from the top to the bottom, the way is made quite plain, and all his people, as “a royal priesthood,” may go, every one for himself, into the very presence of his God — — — Moreover, “a spirit of adoption” is now given by Christ to his believing people; and every one of his true followers is authorized to claim God as his Father, and to consider himself as possessed of an inheritance which, *in body* as well as in his soul, he shall enjoy to all eternity — — — Yes, in this sense are “life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel:” nor has any believer now any more doubt respecting either the present acceptance of a saint, or of his future reign with Christ in glory, than he has of the existence of a God. All this, though very partially and indistinctly known under the Mosaic dispensation, is now so clearly revealed, that a little child may see it, and “he who runs may read it” — — —]

2. In a more abundant measure than it would ever have been enjoyed, if man had never fallen—

[By the Prophet Zechariah, God says, “Turn ye to the strong-hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render *double* unto thee^b:” so Christ here offers to us a double measure of life. Man, if he had never fallen, would have possessed but a creature-righteousness; whereas, through faith in Christ, he becomes possessed of a divine righteousness, and is entitled to address the Saviour himself as “Jehovah, our Righteousness” — — — Moreover, if man

^b Zech. ix. 12.

had never fallen, he would have had very narrow and contracted views of God, in comparison of those which are revealed to him in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. As a creature, he would have beheld the goodness of God: but he could have formed no conception of the justice, and holiness, and mercy, and truth of God; and much less of the union and harmony of all these attributes, as simultaneously exhibited in the person of a crucified Redeemer — — — I add, too, that had he never fallen, his happiness would have been only the gift of grace; whereas, through the coming of Christ, every blessing that he shall enjoy in the eternal world, will bear upon it a stamp of the price it cost, and will be enjoyed by the soul as the fruit and purchase of the Redeemer's blood — — — Take this view of the blessedness which Christ has obtained for us; and I hesitate not to say, that it as far exceeds all that man would otherwise have enjoyed, as the noon-day sun exceeds in radiance the morning-star, or the feeble glimmering of the glow-worm — — —]

1. Let not any of you, then, be satisfied without this life—

[Shall the Son of the living God have left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our nature, and died upon the cross for us, and we be indifferent about the life that he has purchased for us? Would not "the very stones cry out against us?" — — — Tell me, would the apostate spirits, if they were favoured with one such message of mercy as is vouchsafed to you, make light of it as you do? I charge you, then, be in earnest; and, whilst the invitations of the Gospel are yet sounding in your ears, go to this good Shepherd, and seek from him the life which he has come from heaven to bestow — — —]

2. Let not any be satisfied with a small measure of life—

[Christ came, "that you might have it more abundantly." O brethren! you should not be content to live; but should seek to live in the richest possible enjoyment of the Divine favour, and in the most perfect meetness for glory. St. Paul, after all his attainments, "forgot what was behind, and reached forward to that which was before." And that should be the habit of your minds. This is the way to answer the ends of Christ's first advent; and it will be your best preparation for his future advent, when he shall come to judge the world in righteousness, and to bestow, in all its fulness, the life which he has purchased for you — — —]

MDCLXIV.

VOLUNTARINESS OF CHRIST'S UNDERTAKING.

John x. 17, 18. *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

THE subject here insisted on, whilst, at first sight, it appears merely speculative, is really of great importance: for, if the Lord Jesus Christ did not act voluntarily in every part of his mediatorial work, there could be no justice in laying our sins upon him, nor any efficacy in the atonement which he offered for them. It was this willingness of his to endure all which was necessary for our redemption, that put an essential difference between him and all other shepherds. Other shepherds, in countries where their flocks are open to the assaults of wild beasts, have exposed, and even sacrificed, their lives for their flocks: but no one ever undertook the office of a shepherd *on purpose that he might die* for his sheep. This, however, our blessed Saviour did. He foresaw, from all eternity, that, if he would redeem our souls, he must die in our stead: and of his own mind and will, without any necessity or constraint, except what arose from his own love to us and to his heavenly Father, he undertook our cause, and executed all that was necessary for the accomplishment of that stupendous task. The earnestness with which this fact is asserted in my text, together with the acceptableness of it to his heavenly Father, in whose estimation it so greatly raised him, shew, that the whole subject deserves our most attentive consideration. In fact, we cannot have just conceptions of our Saviour's mediatorial work, unless we distinctly mark, I. Its voluntariness on his part—

It is said, indeed, in my text, "This commandment have I received of my Father." Now, it must be remembered, that the Lord Jesus Christ, *as man*, and

as *Mediator*, was the Father's *servant*: as says the prophet; "Behold my *servant*, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth^a." And hence he is spoken of continually as "*sent* by the Father to be the Saviour of the world^b." But, as God, he was equal with the Father, and voluntarily concurred with the Father in executing the plan that was agreed upon between them. This appears,

1. At his first undertaking of the work—

["The counsel of peace was between the Father and the Son^c;" the Son agreeing to "make his soul an offering for sin," and the Father engaging to give him "a seed who should prolong their days" in happiness for ever and ever^d. This mysterious transaction is declared by the Psalmist in the plainest terms; and his words are cited by St. Paul in confirmation of it: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire: mine ears hast thou opened (boring them, as it were, to the door-post, after the manner of a servant, who voluntarily refused his liberty, and consecrated himself for ever to the service of his master^e). Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart^f." And this accords with what our blessed Lord also says, "For their sakes *I sanctify myself*, that they also may be sanctified through the truth^g."]]

2. In all the progressive steps of its advancement—

[Our blessed Lord foresaw all that should come upon him in the performance of his work. "He knew from the beginning, who should betray him^h." In the prospect of his sufferings, he was quite "straitened till they should be accomplishedⁱ." He distinctly and repeatedly foretold all that he was appointed to endure; and, when the time was come for his enduring them, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," for the express purpose that he might endure them^k: and, on Peter's endeavouring to dissuade him from submitting to them, he rebuked him with a severity never manifested on any other occasion, and declared him to be on that occasion an agent and confederate of the devil^l. On the night previous to his crucifixion, he instituted his last Supper; delivering to

^a Isai. xlii. 1.

^b 1 John iv. 9, 10.

^c Zech. vi. 13.

^d Isai. liii. 10.

^e Exod. xxi. 5, 6.

^f Ps. xl. 6—8. with Heb. x. 4—10.

^g John xvii. 19.

^h John vi. 64.

ⁱ Luke xii. 50.

^k Luke ix. 51.

^l Matt. xvi. 23.

every one of his Disciples the bread and the wine, as representing his body broken, and his blood shed, for the remission of their sins^m." When Judas, with an armed band, came to apprehend him, he, by a word, beat them all backward to the ground, to shew that, in his subsequent surrender of himself to them, he acted voluntarily, and not from necessityⁿ. Thus in these, as in a variety of other incidents, he shewed, that neither by fraud nor violence could any man prevail against him; but that, in every part of his work, he freely consented to sustain all that should come upon him.]

3. At the closing scene of his life—

["He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and went altogether like a lamb to the slaughter." If it had pleased him, "he could have called to his aid more than twelve legions of angels;" any individual of whom would have been able to defeat his adversaries, even if they had been a thousand times more numerous than they were^o. "But how, then, should the Scriptures be fulfilled?" He had undertaken to save us; and *therefore* he would not, though he could easily have done it, save himself. And at the very moment that he surrendered up his life, "he cried with a loud voice," in order to shew that his nature was not exhausted, but that *of himself* "he had power to lay down his life," and *did lay it down voluntarily*, and not by constraint. And this very thing so struck the Centurion who superintended the execution, as to convince him that Jesus "was indeed the Son of God^p."

That Jesus raised up himself is also true. He had, in the very beginning of his ministry, declared, that "when the Jews should have destroyed the temple of his body, he would raise it up again in three days^q:" and accordingly he did rise, as he had said. At the appointed time, also, he ascended up to heaven, and sent down his Holy Spirit to carry on the work on earth, whilst he himself should be carrying it on in heaven. Thus he has proved, that, in every part of his work, he has acted voluntarily, "having loved us, and *given himself* for us^r."]

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. Its acceptableness on the Father's part—

In my text, it is said, "*Therefore* the Father loveth me, *because* I lay down my life, that I may take it again." Here again we must observe, that Christ speaks of himself, *not personally*, as the second

^m 1 Cor. xi. 23—26.

ⁿ John xviii. 6.

^o Matt. xxvi. 53.

^p Luke xxiii. 46, 47. with Mark xv. 39.

^q John ii. 19.

^r Gal. ii. 20.

Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, but *officially*, as man and as Mediator. *Personally* he needed nothing, nor could do any thing, to augment the Father's love: for "He and the Father are one," in glory equal, and in majesty co-eternal. But *in his office* he greatly commended himself to the Father's love:

1. In undertaking it so willingly—

[The first intimation of the Father's wish for the redemption of the world was, as we have seen, assented to by the Son, without the slightest hesitation, notwithstanding the means, by which it was to be accomplished, were so difficult and self-denying. To divest himself of all his glory, to assume the nature that had sinned, to bear in his own person the wrath due to our sins, and to "become a curse for us, in order to redeem us from the curse of God's broken law," all this he willingly undertook; because he saw, that, whilst by this mysterious act of condescension he should save our ruined race, he should glorify his God and Father, in a way, and to an extent, in which he never otherwise could be glorified. God had shewn forth his wisdom and power and goodness in the works of creation: and he had manifested his justice and holiness in the condemnation of the fallen angels: but never had he exhibited any trace of mercy, any more than if it had not been an attribute of his nature, or a perfection which it was possible for a holy and just Being to display. But, by undertaking to die in our place and stead, he has satisfied the demands of justice; and, by working out a righteousness for us, he has rendered our acceptance with God compatible with the rights of holiness; and has thus opened a way for the exercise of mercy, not only in perfect consistency with all the other attributes of the Deity, but to the more glorious display of all; thus glorifying justice in a way of mercy, and mercy in a way of justice; or, as the Psalmist expresses it, causing "mercy and truth to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other." This could not but be pleasing to the Father; and, consequently, well might "the Father love him on account of it."]

2. In executing it so completely—

[Never did the Lord Jesus Christ draw back, till he could say "It is finished." By what he did and suffered for us, all the eternal counsels of the Father were fulfilled, and every thing was effected that could conduce either to the honour of God or the good of man. There was nothing left for either

* Gal. iii. 13.

† Ps. lxxxv. 10.

God or man to desire. His atonement fully satisfied Divine justice: his righteousness is fully adequate to our necessities: and now that he has again resumed his life, and has all power committed to him in heaven and in earth, he will complete the work he has begun; and God shall, to all eternity, be glorified in him. In the very prospect of this, when Noah offered up a sacrifice that only shadowed it forth, "God smelled a savour of rest": and much more, when the Lord Jesus Christ offered up himself the true Sacrifice, was the Father well pleased with it! so true is that declaration of St. Paul, that "Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour^x."]]

We see, then, from hence,

1. How to commend ourselves to the Father's love—

[If "the Father loved his own Son *because of his voluntary services*," he will love us also on the same account. Some would be ready to cry out against this, as a *legal* sentiment: but I affirm that it is *truly evangelical*. Hear our blessed Lord's assertions to this effect: "He that *hath my commandments, and keepeth them*, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me *shall be loved* of my Father; and *I will love him*, and will manifest myself to him If a man will love me, *he will keep my words*: and *my Father will love him*; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^y." True, God has given us commandments: but it is not *as servants*, but *as sons*, that we are to obey them; delighting to do his will, even as our Saviour himself did. We are "to esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right; and to abhor every false way^z." It is this readiness, this delight in God's commandments, that constitutes the very summit of evangelical obedience: and in proportion as we abound in it, we hesitate not to say, that God will love us, both in this world and in the world to come. According as with self-denying zeal and diligence we improve our talents for him, he will exalt and magnify us to all eternity^a.]

2. What love we owe to the Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Did the Father, who could receive no benefit from his Son's work, love him *because he laid down his life for us*? What, then, should we do, whose happiness, both in time and in eternity, results from that alone? — — — St. Paul says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha^b." And who, amongst us, will hesitate to add his

^x Gen. viii. 21.

^y Eph. v. 2.

^z John xiv. 21, 23.

^a Ps. cxix. 128.

^b Matt. xxv. 20, 21.

^c 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

Amen to that? Who does not feel the justice of it? Who does not wonder that it has not long since been executed on himself, for his base ingratitude to the Saviour? And who, if hell were at this moment to open and swallow him up quick, must not justify God, and say, "Righteous art thou, O Lord; and true and just are thy judgments?" Sure I am, that however we may attempt to palliate our ingratitude to him now, the time is coming, when "our mouths will be shut^d," and we shall be constrained to acknowledge that "we have received the just reward of our deeds^e." But, brethren, "I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation^f;" and most gladly close my subject with that benevolent petition of the Apostle, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Amen and Amen^e."

• Rev. xix. 2.

^d Matt. xxii. 12.

• Luke xxiii. 41.

^f Heb. vi. 9.

^e Eph. vi. 24.

MDCLXV. .

SECURITY OF CHRIST'S SHEEP.

John x. 27, 28. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

WHILST we acknowledge with gratitude the powers of reason in investigations of a speculative or temporal nature, we must be very jealous of its conclusions in matters that are purely spiritual or practical. In whatever relates to God and to the soul, its decisions are apt to be biassed by prejudice, or interest, or passion; and it yields, or withholds, assent, not so much according to the weight of evidence adduced, as according to the dispositions which are called forth into exercise. This was peculiarly manifest amongst the persons who attended on the ministry of our Lord: some were so wrought upon by the greatness of his miracles, and the impressive wisdom of his discourses, that they could not but receive him as the Messiah; whilst others were always complaining of want of evidence, and always cavilling at his words. In the preceding context we are told, that "the Jews came round about him, and said, How

long dost thou make us to doubt? if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you; and ye believed not." He then informs them what the source was of their unbelief; "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep:" you are destitute of those gracious qualities which would have fitted you for receiving my word: had you been given to me by the Father, and possessed the dispositions which characterize my sheep, you would have both believed in me, and reaped all the benefits of that faith: "My sheep hear my voice; and I know them, and they follow me," &c.

In these words our Lord refers to a conversation which he had recently had with them respecting his sheep; and goes on to declare,

I. Their character—

This is delineated with great simplicity:

1. They hear his voice—

[Sheep that are well attended, are always observant of the shepherd's voice: so is the Christian also of the voice of Christ. Christ speaks to us in his word as truly as ever he spake to his Disciples in the days of his flesh: and it is the delight of all his people to hear and obey his word. The inspired volume is to them a source, an inexhaustible source, of comfort: they read it, they meditate upon it, they pray over it, they "esteem it more than their necessary food." When they open it, they look up to their Divine Master, and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law." Directions, warnings, invitations, promises, are all alike acceptable to them: every thing that conveys to them the mind and will of their good Shepherd, is received with implicit faith, and unreserved obedience.]

2. They follow his steps—

[In the written word they behold the path their Saviour trod; and wherever they see the traces of his feet, they endeavour to follow. They inquire not whether the way be arduous and self-denying, or perilous and beset with enemies; all that they desire is, to ascertain precisely the path of duty; and then to walk in it with steadiness and perseverance. They plainly see that their Shepherd is gone before them towards Zion, regardless of all dangers, indifferent to all the things of this world, and intent only on executing the will of

his heavenly Father; and thither they direct their steps, cultivating in every thing "the mind that was in him," and endeavouring "to walk as he walked."]

In proportion as they pursue this path, they augment,

II. Their happiness—

The Lord Jesus Christ regards them with approbation—

[It is true that he "knows them" all by name; nay more, he knows every thing relating to them, their wants, their weaknesses, their fears, their trials, their exertions, their desires. But the word in our text is intended to express the approbation with which their Shepherd notices their well-meant endeavours^a. And what can afford them greater happiness than the enjoyment of his favour? "In his favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself." Is it asked, How he conveys to them a sense of his favour? I answer, by "the witness of his Spirit," by "the testimony of their own conscience," by "shedding abroad his love in their hearts through the Holy Ghost." It is a certain truth, that "he will manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world:" and he "will give them the white stone, wherein is a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it^b." In this sense of his love, they have a "peace that passeth all understanding," and "a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not."]

He loads them with his richest benefits—

[Whatever he bestows upon them in this world, it is but a taste before the banquet, a drop before the shower, a pledge and earnest of infinitely richer blessings in the world to come. "He gives unto them eternal life:" he has prepared other pastures for them in heaven, where all his sheep from the commencement to the end of time shall be collected, and form "one fold under one Shepherd." If their "joys" even *here* are sometimes "unspeakable," who shall declare the happiness reserved for them against *that* day? Never for a moment will they lose sight of their Beloved: they will hear his voice day and night: they will follow him incessantly without any weariness or difficulty: the richest images that can be borrowed from earthly things are incapable of conveying the smallest idea of the felicity that awaits them. And all this is *given* them; it is given them *freely*; it is given them *now*: it is said in our text, not, "I *will* give them," but, "I *give* them:" the

^a See Ps. i. 6. and 1 Cor. viii. 3.

^b Rev. ii. 17.

very moment that they are brought home to his fold, he bestows it on them: they have instantly a right and title to it; and when they go hence, they go and take possession of it, not as a new gift which shall then be conferred, but as an inheritance, which by the surest of all titles, they have before been enabled to call their own.]

Their ultimate possession of these benefits is insured to them in such a manner, as warrants us to affirm and to rejoice in,

III. Their security—

Nothing shall be permitted to rob them of their inheritance—

[Sheep may perish either from internal disorders, or from outward enemies: and it should seem that the sheep of Christ also may fail of attaining eternal blessedness either through the corruptions of their own hearts, or through the assaults of their spiritual enemies. But against both these dangers their Shepherd has engaged to protect them: “they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.” It is here taken for granted, that they are exposed to things, which, without the intervention of Omnipotence to prevent it, might terminate in their destruction: and every one of them feels that this is really the case. But Jesus guarantees, if I may so say, their safety: he has himself begun the good work in them, and he undertakes to perfect it: he “has laid the foundation in their hearts, and he will finish it, and bring forth the top-stone:” he has reserved heaven for them; and he will keep them for it*.]

For this Jesus pledges his own veracity and his Father’s power—

[It is not asserted here, that they shall never *be tempted*: nor is it asserted that they shall never *fail*: but it is asserted that they shall never *perish*, nor be *plucked out of their Redeemer’s hand*. What shall we say then? That they are at liberty to live in sin? No; there is no such licence allowed them. The way in which they shall be kept from perishing, is, by giving them “*grace sufficient for them*,” by enabling them to “*mortify the deeds of the body*,” and by sanctifying them throughout “*in body, soul, and spirit*,” and by “*bruising Satan under their feet*.” In this way they shall be made “*more than conquerors through Him that loved them*.” And, because Jesus was about to leave his Disciples, and to commit the keeping of them to his heavenly Father, he pledges himself, that his Father also, who was infinitely above all created

* 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

Powers, yea, and greater than he himself also, as man, and as Mediator, should effectually preserve them; and that no enemy should prevail against them, unless he should first overcome Jehovah himself. This then being secured to them by a promise that cannot fail, and by a power that cannot be overcome, we may congratulate the sheep of Christ in the words of their good Shepherd; "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."]

Now because of the singular importance of this subject, we shall,

1. Guard it against abuse—

{By referring the final issue of our warfare to the veracity and power of God, rather than to the faithfulness and diligence of man, it may be thought that we open a door for licentiousness of manners, or at least for carelessness and indifference in our spiritual concerns. But if it be recollected what has been stated as the character of Christ's sheep, (that "they hear his voice" and "follow his steps;") and what has been declared as to the manner of perfecting in them the good work, (that God enables them to mortify sin, and to vanquish Satan;) what room can there be for the objection of its tending to licentiousness? If however there be any man disposed to say, 'God will not suffer me to perish, therefore I will be careless about my walk and conduct,' he needs nothing more to prove that he is not one of Christ's sheep; he has not the smallest resemblance to his sheep; he is altogether deaf to the voice of Christ; he walks in a way directly opposite to his; and, instead of vanquishing sin and Satan, he is overcome by them. Whatever therefore he may call himself, he is no other than a wolf in sheep's clothing. To imagine that he can attain the end without the means, is absurd; for God has ordained not only *the end*, but *the means*, and the end *by* the means. See how clearly this is stated by St. Paul: "God," says he, "hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth⁴." To what hath God chosen us? to enjoy the means of grace? to possess heaven, if we can earn it by our good works? No; he has chosen us *to salvation*, even "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." But has he left it to our choice in what way this end shall be attained? No: he has appointed "sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth," as the way to it: and if we are not proceeding in that way, it is in vain to think of ever attaining that end. If we choose to walk in sin, we may; but it will infallibly lead us to perdition: holiness is

⁴ 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

the appointed path to heaven; and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." To those, therefore, who would take the comfort arising from this subject, we recommend, that they judge of their *state* by their *character* and *conduct*: if they resemble Christ, and are walking truly in his ways, let them confidently trust in Him who "is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy:" but let them never entertain the thought of reaching heaven in any other than the appointed way: for, if they resemble "the goats," it is in vain to hope that they shall have their portion with "the sheep."]

2. Defend it against objections—

[Many are the objections confidently urged against the doctrines here maintained: and I most willingly acknowledge that these mysterious truths are to be stated with extreme caution, and that they should occupy only such a space in our general ministrations as they appear to occupy in the Holy Scriptures. Yet we must not keep back any part of divine truth; but, when occasion offers, must "declare the whole counsel of God." It is true, that many pious men cannot receive these doctrines; and therefore we should, as much as possible, avoid such a statement of them as may wound their minds: still, however, we are not called to suppress the mention of them, but only to concede to others what we claim for ourselves, the right of forming our own judgment, and of being treated with respect and candour by those who differ from us.

It is said that the doctrines before stated are contrary to *Scripture*, to *fact*, and to the interests of *morality*.

The *Scripture*, it is said, abounds with warnings and exhortations to obedience; in many of which our final enjoyment of God's favour is actually suspended on our perseverance in his ways. All this is true; and we are grieved, when any, from an undue attachment to human systems, attempt to deny it: but is it not also true that the Scriptures abound with passages of like import with the text? The great fault of those who adopt human systems is, that they will be wise above what is written, and, instead of receiving God's word as little children, will presume to reject every thing which they cannot reconcile with their own favourite opinions. Who could ever reconcile God's fore-knowledge with the free-will of man? but who will venture to deny either? So, we may not see how to reconcile God's determination to keep his people, with his cautions against the danger of apostasy; and yet God's determinations may exist, without superseding the need of fear and

• Job xvii. 9. Isai. liv. 17. Jer. xxxii. 40.

caution on our part; nay, I am persuaded, that they are carried into effect by means of that very fear which his warnings inspire. And this is, I apprehend, the true solution of the difficulty, as far as it can be solved by man. God's *precepts* teach us what we ought to do: his *exhortations* put us upon making every exertion in our power: his *threatenings* humble us for our short-comings and defects: his *promises* incline us to look to him for strength: and his *covenanted engagements* encourage us to "hope even against hope," and to renew our exertions in an assured expectation of ultimate success. View the different portions of Scripture in this way, and, whatever the heat of controversy may lead men to urge against each other, there will be found no real opposition between them, but a perfect harmony in every part.

But, it may be said, it is contrary to *fact* that the Lord's people are so preserved; for the inspired records inform us of many who "make shipwreck of their faith," and "whose end," in consequence of their apostasy, was "worse than their beginning." This also is true: but it disproves not one atom of what is asserted in our text.

Hear what St. John says to this very point: he acknowledges that some had apostatized from the truth: but, says he, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us." To this it may be replied, that, if apostates are disclaimed as having ever really belonged to Christ, it is impossible to tell who do really belong to him. I readily acknowledge, that no man can know either that he himself belongs to Christ, or that any other person does, except by his works, or in any degree further than he is warranted by his life and conversation. If a man have the mark and character of Christ's sheep, he may have a good hope that he belongs to Christ; but the very moment that he declines from that character, his evidences of relation to Christ decay, and, together with them, his hope of ultimate acceptance with him. "The foundation of God standeth sure; the Lord knoweth them that are his: but let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

As to the objection that these doctrines are contrary to the interests of *morality*, it has been already answered, when we were guarding this subject from abuse. The doctrine that asserts that we shall be *kept in the way of holiness*, can never be inimical to the interests of holiness. But we would further ask, What must be the effect of denying these doctrines?

^f 1 John ii. 19. See this also confirmed by facts, Luke xxii. 31, 32. John xvii. 12.

Will not men be tempted to trust in an arm of flesh? and will not that issue in disappointment? and will not repeated disappointments tend to create despondency? People are apt to dread the idea of despondency as connected with the doctrines of grace: but we will venture to affirm, that, for one instance of despondency arising from a view of the sovereignty of God, and of our entire dependence upon his power and grace, a hundred instances arise from want of just views of this subject. What is the answer which we uniformly receive when we exhort men to walk in the steps of Christ? Is it not *this*! 'We cannot: You require more of us, than we are able to perform?' Of course, in these persons exertion is discouraged; and they remain bond-slaves of Satan, because they conceive it impossible that they should be delivered from his power: whereas, the person who believes that God is all-sufficient and faithful to his promises, is encouraged to renew his application to him from day to day, and, even under the most distressing circumstances, to expect a happy termination of his conflicts. A view of God, as "able to keep us from falling," and as engaged to "perfect that which concerneth us," will be a cordial to the drooping soul: and will enable us to adopt the triumphant language of Christ himself; "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together; Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?" And what the effect will be of such a cheering hope as this, I leave you to judge. Only see it realized in the Apostle Paul, and we have no fear about any conclusions that shall be drawn from it^h.]

3. Improve it for your encouragement—

[What unspeakable encouragement is here afforded to those who are yet ignorant of Christ! Who can hear this saying, and not wish to be numbered amongst his sheep? Methinks the hope of obtaining such security should induce every one to return from his wanderings, and to put himself under his guidance and protection. Where shall we find any such promise made to those who are at a distance from the fold of Christ? Where has God said to *them*, "Ye shall never perish?" To *them* belongs rather that tremendous threatening, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish." O that all who are going astray might consider this, and "return immediately to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls!"

To you who have fled to him for refuge, here is indeed strong consolation. You are sensible of manifold corruptions, any one of which is sufficient to destroy your souls. You feel

^g Isai. l. 8, 9.

^h Rom. viii. 33—39.

your weakness too, and your utter inability to withstand that roaring lion that seeketh to devour you. What then would you do, if you were left to preserve yourselves by the unassisted efforts of your own strength and resolution? To you it is no little joy to be assured, that you are in the hands of an Omnipotent Being, against whom neither earth nor hell shall ever be able to prevail, and who engages in your behalf, that you shall never perish¹. Learn then to "cast your care on Him," and to commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator²."]

¹ 1 John iv. 4.² 1 Pet. iv. 19.

MDCLXVI.

CHRIST ONE WITH THE FATHER.

John x. 30. *I and my Father are one.*

IT might well be expected, that, if God should reveal his will to man, there would be many things disclosed by him, which exceed the narrow limits of human reason. This might more particularly be expected in whatsoever related to his own person and character: for, as we can know nothing of him any farther than he is pleased to reveal himself to us; and as we cannot even comprehend our own nature, or discover how the soul is united to the body; it would be strange indeed if we could comprehend the mode of God's existence, and explain how there should be an union of Three Persons in the Godhead. In relation to such a mysterious subject, our wisdom is to ascertain what God has revealed concerning himself, and to receive it on the testimony of his word. This is the office of reason, as well as of faith: for reason requires, that we submit our understanding to the dictates of His wisdom, no less than our wills to the influence of His authority. That a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead is revealed, cannot reasonably be doubted, as long as the baptismal rite shall continue to be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" for to imagine, that a creature is here associated with Almighty God in the highest possible act of divine

worship, were the height of absurdity, and impiety. The subject before us relates only to the union subsisting between Christ and his Father: to that therefore we shall confine our attention. We begin with considering,

I. The *truth* of our Lord's assertion.

Here mark,

1. The assertion itself—

[Our Lord says, "I and my Father are one." Now it must be remembered, that the same expressions are used, as in human compositions, so also in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in a metaphorical and figurative sense, and sometimes in a plain and literal sense; and their true import must always be judged of by the context. This is particularly the case with respect to the expression before us; which is elsewhere used in reference to the saints, to mark the exalted state to which they are raised by their connexion with Christ, and the mutual interest which they should feel in each other's concerns: "I pray for them, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one^a." Here the sense is obvious: no one could conceive for a moment that the union here spoken of is *personal*, as though the saints could be one *person* with God, or one *person* in their collective capacity: it simply means, that the saints are to enjoy an union with God and with each other, as nearly resembling that which subsists between Christ and his Father, as their situation and circumstances will admit of, namely, an union of sentiment, of affection, of will, and of operation. But, in the passage under our consideration, more is evidently intended: in that is implied, not merely a figurative, but a *real* and *personal* union, an union of nature and of essence.

In proof of this, we must refer you to *the whole scope of the passage*. Our Lord is speaking of the security which his sheep enjoyed; that "He gives unto them eternal life, and that they shall never perish, nor shall any one ever pluck them out of his hand." But, because he was speedily to be taken from them, and might therefore be supposed incapable of fulfilling this promise, he says, that "his Father was confessedly greater than all" created powers, yea, greater than

^a John xvii. 20—23.

he himself was in his human or Mediatorial capacity; and "that none should ever be able to pluck them out of his Father's hand." Yet, that they might know that he would not, on account of his removal from them, remit his care of them, he added, "I and my Father are one;" 'we are one, as in will, so in power; as in operation, so in nature and in essence: and consequently my sheep have a double pledge of their security.'

This is the plain meaning of the passage; and that it is so, may be clearly seen from *the construction which the Jews put upon his words*. They took up stones immediately, to stone him: and when he inquired for which of all his good works they were about to stone him, they replied, that it was "not for any good work, but for blasphemy; because that He, who was only a man like themselves, made himself God^b." Now this shews incontestably what meaning *they* affixed to his words: it was not an ignorant individual, or persons ill acquainted with the received import of the words, that so interpreted them; but the whole audience, who perfectly understood what meaning his expressions were suited to convey.

The Jews were taught by God himself to be particularly jealous on the subject of idolatry; and to put to death any person who should, whether openly or in secret, attempt to seduce them to it. When therefore they heard our Lord arrogate to himself divine honours, they resented it, as they had done repeatedly before, by taking up stones to stone him as a blasphem^c. We do not say, that they were right in expressing their abhorrence of idolatry in this way; because they should have had the matter examined before a magistrate, and have acted according to evidence, and not according to the impulse of their blind passions: but we do say, that Jesus was justly accused of blasphemy, if he was not God; and that there was just cause for the indignation which his audience expressed.

But perhaps they were mistaken in their construction of his words: in which case we may be assured that Jesus would carefully rectify their error. But do we find that he did disclaim the assertion which they called blasphemy? No;

In his answers to them we find only,]

2. His confirmation of it—

[They had just complained that he kept them in suspense; and had desired that he would tell them plainly, who, and what, he was. He, in reply, declares that he had told them, and that they would not believe^d. Had he told them

^b ver. 32, 33.

^c John v. 17, 18. and viii. 58, 59.

^d ver. 25.

that he was a mere man like themselves, they would readily enough have believed *that*: but when he tells them again that he was "one with his Father," they go about to stone him for blasphemy. Nevertheless, instead of revoking his word, he vindicates his claim; and establishes the justice of it *by an appeal to the sacred writings*. Magistrates, he tells them, were in the inspired volume frequently dignified with the name of gods*: and he refers them to one passage in particular, well known to them all, "I have said, Ye are gods[†]." Now these were called gods partly, because they were Jehovah's representatives and vice-gerents upon earth; and partly, because *they were types of the Messiah, who was to be really and truly God*, even "EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US[‡]." 'Now,' says our Lord, 'if these persons, in order to prepare you for the reception of your incarnate God, were honoured with the name and title of gods, and you readily acquiesced in it, with what reason can you, when your incarnate God appears, accuse him of blasphemy, because he assumes that title, or calls himself by a name which you justly consider as equivalent to it? You are looking for your Messiah; and that Messiah is expressly foretold under the character of "Jehovah's fellow[§]," who is "David's Lord, as well as David's Son^{||}:" such therefore the Messiah *must* be; for "*the Scripture cannot be broken*:" why then do you not acknowledge the justice of my claim? If indeed I do not give evidence enough that I am the Messiah, you may justly dispute my title to be regarded as God; but if I do, then you are the blasphemers, who rob me of my proper honour. Know ye then, that I am the Person "whom the Father hath sanctified" and set apart from all eternity to the office, "and now hath sent into the world" to execute it: know also, that, instead of retracting any thing I have said, I repeat my assertions, and demand your acknowledgment of me in my true character.'

Thus our Lord confirms his assertion by an appeal to Scripture. He next proceeds to confirm it *by an appeal to his own works*. 'I do not desire to be credited in such an assertion upon my bare unsupported word, without any corroborating evidence,' says our Lord: "'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but, if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him[¶]." Consider my works, both *the matter*, and the *manner* of them, and see if they do not justify every assertion I have made. Did ever *man* perform such miracles as I have done, so many,

* Exod. vii. 1. and xxii. 28.

† Isai. vii. 14. Matt. i. 23.

‡ Ps. cx. 1. with Matt. xxii. 42—45.

§ Ps. lxxxii. 6.

¶ Zech. xiii. 7.

‡ ver. 37, 38.

so great, so benevolent, so demonstrative of a divine agency? Moses indeed and the prophets wrought some few miracles: but *how*? they wrought them uniformly by application to Jehovah for the intervention of his power: but look at my miracles: on some occasions indeed, I also, acting in my mediatorial capacity, have acknowledged my dependence on him, and have acted "in his name," as his servant¹; (for as Mediator, I *am* his servant:) but, as being *One* with the Father, I have wrought in instances without number by that power and authority which I possess in common with the Father. Whence had I the power to still the elements as I have done^m; or to expel Satanⁿ, or to raise the dead^o? When the leper justly acknowledged my power to effect whatsoever I *would*; to whom was I indebted for power to heal him, when I said, "I *will*, Be thou clean?"^p

Such an appeal as this was sufficient to convince the most incredulous: and it receives much additional light from the manner in which the Apostles wrought their miracles: they wrought them invariably *in the name of Jesus*^q; and disclaimed all idea of any inherent power in themselves, or even of any goodness on account of which God had wrought by them; so fearful were they, lest by any means they should rob the Lord Jesus of the honour due unto his name^r.

Shall it be said that our Lord did not mean in this appeal to assert his true and proper Godhead? Then see both his words, and the sense in which his enraged adversaries continued to understand them: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works; that *ye may know and believe*, that the Father is in me, and I in him.—*Therefore they sought again to take him.*" Here are two things demonstrated; first, that his enemies understood him to affect equality with God: and next, that He, knowing that they did so understand him, renewed and confirmed the assertions which they had so interpreted. A clearer explanation of what he affirmed, or a stronger proof of **WHAT HE IS**, we cannot reasonably desire.]

We are the more earnest in establishing the Divinity of our blessed Lord, because it is intimately connected with every fundamental truth of our holy religion.

To illustrate more fully the truth asserted, I proceed to mark,

¹ Luke xi. 41—43. ^m Mark iv. 39.

ⁿ Mark ix. 25.

^o Mark v. 41. Luke vii. 14.

^p Matt. viii. 8.

^q Acts ix. 34. and xvi. 18.

^r Acts iii. 6, 12, 16. with iv. 9, 10, 12.

II. The incalculable importance of it—

This truth established, we behold in the clearest light—

1. The dignity of his person—

[Because God condescended to take our nature upon him, we requite his love by denying him to be God. But know that Jesus Christ is indeed “the true God^a,” “the mighty God^b,” “the great God and our Saviour^c,” “God over all, blessed for evermore^d.” He is “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person^e,” yea, in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^f.” Hear what he himself saith unto Philip: Philip, having heard him speaking of the Father, as actually known to his Disciples, and already seen by them, saith, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” To this Jesus replies, “Have I been so long with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works’ sake^g.” Now, I ask, if Jesus had not been really “one with the Father, would he have dared to use such language as this? And, if his Disciples were guilty of idolatry in worshipping him, was not the fault altogether his? Were not his words and his arguments expressly calculated to mislead and deceive them? But there is no room for doubt on this head. We never can entertain too high thoughts of him; nor can we ever honour him as we ought, unless we “honour him, even as we honour the Father^h.”]

2. The virtue of his sacrifice—

[On the dignity of his person depends the whole value of his atonement. The Apostle justly observes, that “it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin:” and the same observation may with justice be applied to every creature, however exalted. But when we are assured that it was “God who was manifest in the fleshⁱ,” that it was “the Lord of glory that was crucified^j,” and that it was “God who purchased the Church with his own blood^k,” we no longer hesitate to declare that his death was “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world^l.” He was, it is true, “in the form of a servant;

^a 1 John v. 20.

^b Isai. ix. 6.

^c Tit. ii. 13.

^d Rom. ix. 5.

^e Heb. i. 3.

^f Col. ii. 9.

^g John xiv. 7—11.

^h John v. 23.

ⁱ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^j 1 Cor. ii. 8.

^k Acts xx. 28.

^l The Communion Service; and 1 John ii. 2.

but he was also in the form of God^f, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God^g; and therefore we may be assured that "his blood will cleanse us from all sin^h." The ransom he has paid for us, is fully equal to the redemption of a ruined world: and the righteousness which he has wrought out for us by his obedience unto death, is all that is wanted for the justification of those who trust in it. The very name given him by the prophet declares this; for we are taught to "call him, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESSⁱ." Here then "the weary and heavy-laden may find rest unto their souls" — — —]

3. The sufficiency of his grace—

[If Jesus were only a creature, those who trust in him might be addressed like the worshippers of Baal, "Cry aloud, for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey; or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked^k." He could not attend to the concerns of the whole universe at once; and therefore could not be a suitable object of our trust and confidence. But he is infinitely above all creatures, being "King of kings, and Lord of lords^l." He could truly say to Paul, and to every suppliant in the universe, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Let not any one then despond, as though his corruptions were irremediable, or his enemies invincible; for "God hath laid help for us upon One that is mighty^m:" and the weakest of the human race that relies on him, may confidently say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strengthⁿ." "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation^o:" "The Lord is my shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing^p."]

4. The excellency of his salvation—

[If we consider the price that has been paid, we may judge of the value of that redemption which has been purchased for us. Even in relation to the present life, we are told that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him^q." Under whatever figure they are spoken of, they are represented as exceeding all human apprehension: "the gift of them is unspeakable^r:" "the riches of them unsearchable^s:" the peace that is enjoyed by means of them, passeth understanding^t;" and "the joy which they produce, is unspeakable and glorified^u:" the love that bestowed them has

^g Phil. ii. 6—8.

^h 1 John i. 7.

ⁱ Jer. xxxiii. 16.

^k 1 Kings xviii. 27.

^l Rev. xix. 16.

^m Ps. lxxxix. 19.

ⁿ Isai. xlv. 24.

^o Isai. xii. 2.

^p Ps. xxiii. 1.

^q Isai. lxiv. 4. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

^r 2 Cor. ix. 15.

^s Eph. iii. 8.

^t Phil. iv. 7.

^u 1 Pet. i. 8.

“a height and depth, and length and breadth” that can never be explored^z. Respecting the future life, we are still further from being able to appreciate the glories of it. The description of heaven, as a city paved with gold, and enriched with every thing magnificent or good, affords but a faint idea of that glorious place^y; as the songs and music of its inhabitants very inadequately represent their blessedness and joy^z. But this we know, that, both on earth and in heaven, the felicity of the saints shall be worthy of the sacrifice that was made to obtain it. Let not any one then seek it in a listless and lukewarm manner, as though it were of little value — — — for it is a “great salvation^a,” which the tongues of men and angels can never worthily describe, nor can the ages of eternity suffice to enumerate its blessings.]

^z Eph. iii. 18.

^y Rev. xxi. 10—23.

^a Rev. v. 8—14. and xiv. 1—3.

^a Heb. ii. 3.

MDCLXVII.

CHRIST THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

John xi. 25, 26. *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this ?*

IN great and long continued afflictions, we are apt to entertain hard thoughts of God. But, whatever be his intention with respect to the ungodly, we are sure that he designs nothing but good to his own peculiar people, even when he appears most regardless of their supplications. There are two ends which he invariably proposes to himself in his dispensations towards them; namely, the brighter revelation of his own glory, and the fuller manifestation of it to their souls.

In the history before us we have an account of a heavy affliction that had befallen a family, through the death of one, to whom Jesus had shewn a very peculiar attachment. He had been solicited to come and help them; but he had delayed his visit till the sick person had been dead four days. This however, though liable to misconstruction, he had done intentionally, in order that he might manifest more fully

to the disconsolate sisters his own power and glory. Accordingly, when they intimated their persuasion, that, if he would pray to God for the restoration of their brother to life, God would grant his request, he told them that he needed not beseech God to effect it; for that he himself was the resurrection and the life; and was able to impart either bodily or spiritual life to whomsoever he would.

In considering this most remarkable declaration, we shall notice,

I. That part which relates to himself—

Martha having, in conformity with the prevailing opinion of the Jews, expressed her expectation of a general resurrection at the last day, Jesus says to her,

“I am the resurrection”—

[Our Lord, in his divine nature, possessed omnipotence necessarily, and of himself. In his mediatorial capacity he was invested with it by his Father, agreeably to the plan concerted in the divine counsels. To him who had undertaken to procure salvation for a fallen world, was delegated all power requisite for the full discharge of that office. The restoring of his people to a new and heavenly life after death, was essential to their complete salvation: this therefore was committed to him^a; and he both declared he would execute this great work^b, and gave an earnest of its accomplishment in raising himself from the dead^c.]

“I am the life”—

[In this term our Lord proceeds further than in the former, and asserts, that as he is the author and first-fruits of the resurrection, so is he the very principle of life whereby his people live. This might indeed be collected from many figurative expressions of Scripture, which represent him as the fountain of life to all his people^d: but we are not left to gather such an important truth from mere parables; it is asserted frequently in the plainest terms: he is a quickening spirit^e, that liveth in us^f, and is our very life^g. He is to the soul, what the soul is to the body; he pervades, animates, and invigorates all our spiritual faculties: by his secret energy our

^a John v. 21, 25—29.

^b John vi. 39, 40.

^c John x. 18. 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^d John xv. 1. Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 45.

^f John xiv. 6. and vi. 57. and Gal. ii. 20.

^g Col. iii. 4.

understanding is enabled to apprehend divine truth, and our will inclined to obey it: and, without him, the soul would be as dead as the body without the soul.]

Let us now prosecute our inquiries into,

II. That which respects his people—

There is a remarkable correspondence between the two latter, and the two former clauses of the text; the latter declaring the operation of the powers expressed in the former.

1. As being “the resurrection,” he will raise the bodies of his people—

[Judging of things according to our weak reason, we are ready to think that the restoration of bodies, which may have undergone so many changes, is impossible. But cannot He who formed the universe out of nothing, collect the atoms that constitute our identity, and reunite them to their kindred souls? He can, and will; yea, that very Jesus, who died upon the cross, has the keys of death and of hell^h, and will effect this by his own almighty powerⁱ.

This clause might further intimate, that by the first act of faith in him our souls should be made partakers of spiritual life. And this would accord with other passages of Scripture^k, and prepare us for the next clause, which, rising in a climax, declares the benefits that shall result from a continued life of faith upon him.]

2. As being “the life,” he will preserve the souls of his people unto everlasting life—

[The bodies of the saints must undergo the sentence denounced against sin^l; (though death to *them* is scarcely worthy the name of death; it is rather a sleep, from which they shall be awakened at the morning of the resurrection^m;) but their souls shall never die: none shall prevail against themⁿ; none shall pluck them out of Christ's hands^o; their life is hid in him beyond the reach of men or devils^p; the vital principle within them is an ever-living seed^q, an over-flowing fountain^r: as long as Christ liveth, they shall live also^s. The separation that will take place between their souls and bodies will only introduce them to a higher state of existence, which they shall enjoy until the day that their bodies shall be awakened from their slumbers, to participate and enhance their bliss.]

^h Rev. i. 18.

^k John vi. 33, 35. and vii. 38. and x. 10.

^m ver. 11. Acts vii. 60. 1 Thess. iv. 14.

ⁿ John x. 28.

^p Col. iii. 3.

^r John iv. 14.

^s John xiv. 19.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 21.

^l Rom. viii. 10.

^o Isai. liv. 17.

^q 1 Pet. i. 23.

We must not however fail to notice the description given of those to whom these promises are made—

[*Twice*, in these few words, are these blessings limited to believers: not because our Lord disregards good works, or because they shall not be rewarded; but because we cannot do any good work unless we first receive strength from Christ by faith^t; and because, if we obtained life by working, we should have whereof to glory before God: and God has decreed that no flesh shall glory in his presence, and that we shall glory only in the Lord^u. It must never be forgotten that God has caused all fulness to dwell in his Son, Jesus Christ^x; and that we must, by a continued exercise of faith, receive out of that fulness grace for grace^y. It is by faith that we live^z, we stand^a, we walk^b, we are saved^c: in a word, "God has given us eternal life; but this life is *in his Son*: he therefore that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life^d."]

The pointed interrogation with which our Lord closed this address to Martha, directs us how to IMPROVE this subject: it suggests to us,

1. That all persons, however eminent in their profession, or decided in their character, ought to "examine themselves whether they be in the faith"—

[It was to one whom he knew to be an humble and faithful Disciple, that Jesus put this question: well therefore may we who are of more doubtful character, consider it as addressed to *us*; "Believest thou this?" Believest thou that Christ is the only fountain of life; and that there is no way of receiving life from him but by faith? And dost thou believe these things, not in a mere speculative manner (for *that* many do whose souls are dead before God) but in such a way as to reduce them to practice? The believing of this record forms the one line of distinction between those that shall be saved, and those that shall perish. If we truly receive it, we have already passed from death unto life^e: if we do not receive it, we are yet dead in trespasses and sins: we have not life now; we cannot have life hereafter. A resurrection indeed we shall partake of; but it is a resurrection to damnation, and not a resurrection to life^f: we shall live; but it will be a life justly denominated death,

^t John xv. 5. ^u Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9. 1 Cor. i. 29—31.

^x Col. i. 19.

^y John i. 16.

^z Gal. iii. 11.

^a 2 Cor. i. 24.

^b 2 Cor. v. 7.

^c Gal. ii. 16.

^d 1 John v. 11, 12.

^e John v. 24.

^f John v. 29.

the second death^s. Let us not then defer our inquiries into a subject which is of such infinite importance.]

2. That the believing of this record is the most effectual antidote against the troubles of life or the fears of death—

[If Martha had felt the full influence of these truths, she would have moderated her sorrows, under the persuasion that her loss was her brother's gain; and that, if her brother were not restored to life, she should soon meet him in a better world. Thus in every state the consideration of these truths will afford to us also unspeakable consolation: for if we believe in Christ, and have through him the possession of spiritual, and the prospect of eternal life, what cause can we have to complain; what cause to fear? The world will be divested of its allurements, and death of its terrors. Satisfied that all events are under the controul of our best Friend, we shall commit them cheerfully to his wise disposal; and looking forward to the day in which he will call us from our graves, we shall expect his summons with composure at least, if not also with a holy impatience. Let us then live by faith in our divine Saviour, assured that he will keep us unto eternal life, and exalt us, both in body and soul, unto the everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory^h.]

^s Rev. xx. 14.

^h In the place of the foregoing the following might be used:—

In considering this most remarkable declaration, we shall notice,

I. The affirmation—

This relates,

1. Partly to our Lord himself—

["I am the Resurrection and the Life." These expressions doubtless refer in a measure to that power which our Lord possesses, and which at a future period he will surely exercise, to raise the dead. But it must principally be understood as declaring his power to restore the souls of men to spiritual and eternal life. This power he possesses essentially as God; and in his mediatorial office he has received it from the Father to be exercised for his chosen people. In them he will not only act, but live; himself being the very life of their souls, and performing in their souls every office which the soul itself performs in the body — — —]

2. Partly to his believing people—

[There is a remarkable correspondence between the two latter, and the two former clauses of the text; the latter declaring the operation of the power expressed in the former.

The souls that are dead he will restore to life. Only let a person who has hitherto been dead in trespasses and sins, believe in him, and immediately he shall "pass from death to life," and be enabled to perform all the functions of a child of God — — —

And one who by faith has been restored to life, shall, by the exercise of the same faith, be preserved even to the end : no enemy shall prevail against him, or separate him from the Redeemer's love — — — His body may die even as others : but his soul shall live for ever ; and his body too be raised again to be partaker of its bliss.]

II. The interrogation founded upon it—

This may be understood as put to Martha,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[Even she might profitably examine whether her faith in him was genuine. And much more does a similar inquiry become us. Let it not be supposed that all who are called Christians possess this faith : in truth, but few possess it — — — Yet is it that alone which will ensure to us eternal life.]

2. In a way of reproof—

[Her grief on this occasion, though natural, was, on the whole, carried to excess : and the question, thus put to her, might intimate, that her principles were not operative to a just extent. The proper office of faith was to compose her mind under all trials, and to elevate her above all the things of time and sense. Are any of you then greatly agitated, and sinking under the weight of your trials ? Remember how unsuitable this is to your high calling : and beg of God that your faith and patience may have their proper work.]

3. In a way of encouragement—

[What can any person want, who has such a Saviour to go unto, and such privileges to enjoy ? Surely in him there is all fulness for a supply of all our wants : and in our prospects of eternal life all other things should, as it were, be lost, like the stars before the rising sun. Brethren, behold your Saviour possessed of "all power in heaven and in earth." Behold him engaged for you, and exercising all his powers for you. He is "the Resurrection," that *you* may rise ; "the Life," that *you* may live. Through him you *do* live : through him you *shall* live. Nor need you be afraid of death : for to you it shall be the gate of heaven, the commencement of a glorious and everlasting life.]

N. B. The references in the former will afford suitable quotations for the illustration of this. And if it were a *Funeral Discourse*, the two latter heads might be profitably addressed to the surviving friends.

MDCLXVIII.

SYMPATHY.

John xi. 35. *Jesus wept.*

THE Holy Scriptures are, beyond all comparison, superior to any other book ; in that they reveal to us truths which human reason could never have

explored, and administer consolations which no human composition could ever have imparted. But it is not *merely* on these accounts that they are to be valued. Taking them as records only, they are deeply interesting, because of the incidents which they bring to our view, and the simplicity which pervades the narration of them. The history of Joseph, for instance, stands unrivalled in this view in the Old Testament, as does the account of Lazarus in the New. By what is related concerning him, we are introduced into the bosom of a pious family, the happiness of which is interrupted for a time by the disease and death of its chief member; and is afterwards exalted a hundred-fold, by the restoration of that person to life. We forbear to enter into the particulars of that history, as they may be read by every one at home: but we would call your attention to that particular incident mentioned in our text, "Jesus wept."

In these words we have,

I. A memorable occurrence—

Only reflect on the person of whom this is spoken. He was no other than our incarnate God; who, being absolutely perfect in every respect, was far above the reach of those passions with which we are apt to be transported, and had all his feelings in perfect subjection: yet of him it is said, that, at the grave of Lazarus, "he wept."

But from whence proceeded these tender emotions? They arose,

1. From sympathy with his afflicted friends—

[Such was his regard for Lazarus and his sisters, that his friendship for them was a matter of public notoriety*. And now that death had made an inroad on their happiness, and reduced the surviving sisters to deep distress, he could not but feel for them, and participate in their sorrows. In truth, sympathy is a necessary fruit of love, and altogether inseparable from it. When, therefore, our Lord saw these friends weeping so bitterly, and their friends and attendants weeping

* ver. 3, 5.

also, he could no longer refrain, but had his own cheeks also suffused with tears^b. To this principle the spectators ascribed his tears: they all exclaimed, "Behold, how he loved him!"

2. From compassion for their remaining infirmities—

[After all that they had seen and known of him, they should have assigned no limits either to his power or grace. Yet behold, though they did believe that he could have preserved their brother from death, they had no conception that he was able to restore him from the grave. Though he had intimated to them his intention to do so, they could not believe him: and when he actually prepared to do so, they imagined that the period which had elapsed since his death, and which, according to the common course of things, would have caused the body to decay, was an insurmountable obstacle to his purpose^d. Well might this give pain to his holy soul. And that it did so, we see from the reproof which he administered: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" With his own Disciples, also, he was frequently grieved on the same account^e.]

3. From grief for the obduracy of those, who, he knew, would be yet further hardened by this miracle—

[This, I doubt not, entered deeply into his feelings at this time. It was for their conviction that he had refrained from healing Lazarus at first, and had afterwards delayed coming to his friends till he had been four days dead^f. It was for the very same end that, instead of exerting his own Almighty power in the way that he usually did, he prayed to his heavenly Father to effect the miracle; shewing thereby the Father's union with him in all that he did, and thus placing beyond all reasonable doubt the truth of his own Messiahship^g. But "he knew what was in man:" he knew that this stupendous miracle would only enrage some of them the more, in proportion as it carried conviction to the minds of others; and that, instead of converting their souls, it would only precipitate them into more heinous guilt and wickedness. All this it eventually did^h: and all this he foresaw. We wonder not, then, that he wept; seeing that the very means he was using for the salvation of men, would issue, with respect to many of them, in their more aggravated condemnation. Nor were these things of rare occurrence. They prevailed amongst

^b ver. 33.

^c ver. 36.

^d ver. 39.

^e Matt. viii. 26. Mark xvi. 14.

^f ver. 6, 15.

^g ver. 41—43.

^h ver. 46—50, 53, 57. with xii. 10, 11.

the great mass of his hearers, and proved a source of continual sorrow to his soul¹.]

But in these words we have, also,

II. An instructive lesson—

Were we to trace this occurrence in all its bearings, we should scarcely know where to begin, or where to end. We shall content ourselves, therefore, with noticing only two or three things which naturally arise out of it.

We see then from it,

1. That there is no condition in this life, in which men are exempt from sorrow—

[Had there been any exception from the common lot of all men, we should have looked for it in such a family as that of Lazarus, where there was such ardent love between all the members of it, and so peculiar an interest in the favour of the Lord Jesus; or, at all events, we should expect to find it in our incarnate God. But death invaded their peaceful mansion; and filled the surviving sisters with distress, in which also the Saviour himself participated. Who then, amongst us, can hope for freedom from the general lot? Truly, this is a “Bochim²,” a vale of tears, to every child of man. However prosperous our condition may be, no one “knows what a day or an hour may bring forth.” Either in our own persons, or in our families and connexions, it will be strange indeed if something do not frequently occur to damp our joys, and to remind us that “this is not our rest:” for “man is born to trouble,” as naturally and as certainly, “as the sparks fly upward.”]

2. What is of necessity the operation of divine grace in the soul—

[The sum and substance of all practical religion is love: and wherever love exists, there will be sympathy: for it is impossible but that the members of the same body should have a community of feeling with each other¹. To “rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep,” is the necessary fruit and consequence of grace in the soul². The man that is devoid of these holy feelings is destitute of piety altogether³. In truth, for our griefs and sorrows we have the

¹ Mark iii. 5. and John xiii. 21.

² Judg. ii. 5.

³ 1 Cor. xii. 25.

² Rom. xii. 15. See instances Heb. x. 31. Phil. ii. 26—28.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

very same occasions as at this time presented themselves to our blessed Lord. There are troubles and calamities all around us: and if we have our souls duly impressed with them, we shall be able to say, with holy Job, "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?" But if there are no particular troubles that come under our cognizance, who can open his eyes and not see to what an extent sign reigns in all the world? And should not *that* move us? Should not "rivers of waters run down our eyes, because men keep not God's law?" Should we not say with the Prophet Jeremiah, "O that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the sins and miseries of my people!" Nor should the defects of those who profess godliness escape our notice. When Paul marked the conduct of some at Philippi, he was quite distressed in his soul because of the delusions by which they were blinded: "Many walk," says he, "of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and that their end is destruction." And so tenderly did he enter into the concerns of all, that he could say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" This is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus;" and in this every true disciple will resemble him.*]

3. What a Friend we have, before whom to spread all the sins and sorrows wherewith we are oppressed—

[Has any temporal calamity befallen you? He who wept at the grave of Lazarus invites you to call upon him: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will hear thee; and thou shalt glorify me." Are you loaded with a sense of guilt? The same Almighty Friend says to you, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden; and I will give you rest." Very remarkable is that expression of his pity for Ephraim of old: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus. . . . Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? For, since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: yea, my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." And do you think that he will exercise less compassion towards you? O, know for a certainty, that you "have not a High-Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as you are, yet without sin." Be it

* Job xxx. 25.

† Phil. iii. 18, 19.

‡ Ps. l. 15.

§ Heb. iv. 15.

¶ Ps. cxix. 136.

• 2 Cor. xi. 29.

* Matt. xi. 28.

† Jer. ix. 1.

‡ Phil. ii. 4, 5.

§ Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

so, that your sins appear to be of more than ordinary enormity, because of the circumstances under which they have been committed: shall you therefore despond? Be assured, that He who wept over the murderous Jerusalem^a, has lost none of his compassion, but is alike willing to exercise his mercy towards you. He is justly called "the Consolation of Israel:" and, if you seek him, he will be found of you: though you were dead, yet should you live: and if you will truly believe in him, you shall assuredly behold the glory of God^b."]]

^a Luke xix. 41, 42.

^b ver. 25, 40.

MDCLXIX.

LAZARUS RAISED.

John xi. 40. *Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?*

SUCH is the state of God's people upon earth, that they can scarcely ever come into trying circumstances without discovering the frailty of their nature, and laying themselves open to reproof from their Divine Master. But in all the rebukes which our Lord gave his Disciples, we may notice a peculiar tenderness, like that of a parent towards his beloved child^a. In the passage before us he had occasion to reprove the unbelief of Martha: but he could not possibly have done it in milder terms.

In considering this reproof, let us notice,

I. What it spake to her—

She, in her extremity, sent to Jesus, to entreat him to restore her brother Lazarus to health—

[Bethabara beyond Jordan, where Jesus was, was a long day's journey from Bethany. Martha and Mary had foreborne to inform him of their distress, till they despaired of obtaining help for their brother except from his miraculous interposition. In answer to their petition, he sent them word, that "the sickness of their brother should not be unto death; but that the Son of God should be glorified thereby^b." But, instead of attending to the request immediately, he staid where he was two days, and then went to Bethany, and found, that Lazarus,

^a Matt. xiv. 31. Mark ix. 33—37.

^b ver. 4.

who had died soon after the departure of the messenger, "had been dead and buried four days^c." Martha, hearing of his arrival, went forth to meet him, and expressed her regret that Jesus had not been there whilst her brother was yet alive, since she was confident, that he would have exerted his almighty power to restore him to health. Our Lord now repeated what he had declared to the messenger, and told her that "her brother should rise again^d." She however, supposing him to speak of what should take place "at the last day," took no notice of his words as a ground of present consolation. Jesus therefore proceeded to speak more plainly, that "He himself was the resurrection and the life: and that one who believed in him, though he were dead, yet should live, yea, and never die.^e" But still she did not see in this, that he who could restore dead *souls* to life, could also with equal ease restore a *body* that was dead. When therefore he ordered the stone to be removed from his grave, she intimated, that the state of his body, now putrid, placed it beyond a possibility of restoration to life. Upon this our blessed Lord administered the reproof which we are now considering: "Said I not, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Then, not being "extreme to mark what was done amiss," he spake the word, "Lazarus, come forth:" and immediately he that was dead came forth, with all the solemn appendages of death adhering to him; and was again restored to the society of his beloved sisters and friends.]

By the mercy vouchsafed to her on this occasion
"God was greatly glorified"—

[How wonderful must the condescension and grace of God appear to Martha, when she saw the request of such unworthy creatures as herself and her sister prevailing to such an extent as this! — — — And what a confirmation had she now before her eyes of that truth which she had already confessed, that "Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God, that was to come into the world^f!" — — — What an enjoyment too would they henceforth have of their brother's society, whose presence could not fail of bringing all these things to their remembrance, and of calling forth on all occasions their devoutest praises and thanksgivings to their God and Saviour! — — — Thus then did she indeed see the glory of God, notwithstanding her faith, though true, fell very far short of that perfect standard to which it ought to have attained.]

But, not to confine the reproof to her, let us consider,

^c ver. 17.^d ver. 21—23.^e ver. 25, 26.^f ver. 27.

II. What it speaks to us—

To us does the Lord Jesus speak in his word, as truly as he ever spake to Martha, or to his own Disciples. To ourselves then we may apply that question, “Said I not thus and thus unto thee? and that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” Yes: and in this reproof we see,

1. That whatever the Lord Jesus has spoken to us, should be treasured up in our minds—

[In his word are “exceeding great and precious promises:” and every one of them is made to us: and it is no less our duty, than our privilege, to rely upon them, and to expect their accomplishment to our souls. For instance, He has told us that “those who come to God by him God will in no wise cast out”—that “all manner of sin and wickedness shall be forgiven unto them—and that “they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life.” These, and ten thousand other promises we should treasure up in our minds, and plead them before God in prayer. Nor should we ever be discouraged by any *difficulties* or any *delays*. The *difficulties* may be designed of God for the fuller manifestation of his own glory — — — and the *delays* be permitted to endear to us the more the mercies that he will vouchsafe unto us.]

2. That the more we exercise faith in God the more will he manifest to us his glory—

[God will honour faith. See it in the case of Abraham and in the case of Moses: How much more visible were his power and grace in the birth of Isaac when he was given to Abraham after all hope of any progeny had ceased, and when restored to him afterwards, as it were, from the dead! And how did every difficulty that interposed between the first message delivered to Pharaoh and the final establishment of the Hebrews in the promised land, display and magnify the grace of God in that stupendous dispensation! So shall we find in all God's dealings with us, the more we are tried, the more will his glory appear to us, if only we stagger not at his promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to him! Only let us never limit his power, or doubt his veracity. If our case appear as desperate as that of Lazarus, let us not therefore doubt, and much less despond: for sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, that one jot or tittle of his word shall fail” — — —]

MDCLXX.

THE PROPHETIC COUNSEL OF CAIAPHAS.

John xi. 51, 52. *This spake he not of himself: but being high-priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*

IT is often found that the people who are not humbled and converted by the Gospel, are irritated and incensed by it; and that, to justify their rejection of its truths, they become persecutors of those who preach it. When their prejudices are once excited, nothing will allay them. However exemplary a minister may be in his conduct, however benevolent in his purposes, however wise and discreet in his exertions, he cannot escape their censure, or ward off their hatred. Rather than he should pass without censure, the very best actions of his life shall be brought against him as grounds of accusation. The abundance of his labours and the success of his endeavours shall be reported as matters worthy of blame, and shall be made the grounds of inveterate persecution. It was thus when our blessed Lord himself ministered on earth. His wisdom or benevolence none can doubt: yet was he "a butt of contradiction" to all around him. He had just wrought a stupendous miracle in raising from the grave a man who had been dead four days, and who, in that climate, must have begun to putrefy. Would any one suppose that this should give offence? yet behold, some who were present, went and made the miracle an occasion of grievous complaint; insomuch that the high-priest instantly convened a council, in order to concert measures for preventing a repetition of such offences in future. After some of the chief-priests had offered their opinions, the high-priest himself, in a very contemptuous and dictatorial tone, decided the point at once; and determined, that private,

* Σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον.

should give way to public, good: this, he said, common policy required; and therefore it was expedient to destroy the author of this benevolent act, lest the popularity which he had acquired by means of it, should excite the jealousy of the Roman government, and call down their vengeance on the whole nation. This advice was immediately, though not unanimously^b, agreed to; (for any argument will suffice, when prejudice is the judge;) and means were instantly adopted for executing the decree. But the text informs us, that this advice, pronounced as it was with oracular authority, was indeed an oracle; though it was dictated by God in a very different sense from that in which it was intended by Caiaphas. We shall therefore illustrate it in both points of view:

I. As intended by Caiaphas—

Caiaphas meant only, that, as the state would be (in his apprehension) endangered by the popularity of Jesus, common policy required that they should destroy him at once. But what advice was this to come from a minister of religion, yea, from God's high-priest!

1. How unjust!

[Here was nothing criminal laid to the charge of our blessed Lord; yet was he to be treated as a criminal, and to be put to death as a malefactor. On what principle could this be justified. We do not hesitate to say, that nothing can warrant such a procedure. If a man think that he can benefit the State by exposing his own life, he is at liberty to do it; yea, every true Christian ought to be willing to "lay down his life for the brethren:" he should even account the sacrificing of his life in such a cause, to be rather a source of exultation and triumph, than of dread and sorrow^c. But no tribunal under heaven can take away the life of an innocent man: nor ought that which is radically unjust, ever to be sanctioned by legal authority.]

2. How impious!

[It was acknowledged by Caiaphas himself, that Jesus had wrought "miracles," "many" miracles; and miracles of such a nature as to carry conviction with them to every beholder^d.

^b Luke xxiii. 51. ^c 1 John iii. 16. Phil. ii. 17. ^d ver. 47, 48.

Now these miracles proved to demonstration, that Jesus was sent by God himself: they were the broad seal of heaven attesting his Divine commission. What then was the advice, but a direct opposition to God himself? There was not so much as an attempt to cover the impiety: a fear of man's displeasure was the avowed and only reason for the commission of it. To what a height of wickedness must that man have attained, who could offer such advice; and that council who could adopt it!]

3. How absurd!

[The Jewish history might have shewn the council, that the Romans could not prevail against them any further than God authorized and empowered them to do so. Consequently, if they looked no further than to their temporal happiness, it was their wisdom rather to conciliate the favour of God by doing what was right, than to provoke him to anger by murdering his dear Son. Yet, so infatuated were they, as to fear "the axe, rather than him that heweth therewith;" and to draw down the certain displeasure of the Almighty, rather than incur the danger of displeasing a worm like themselves. The event proved the folly of their choice: for the very means they used to avoid destruction, brought down destruction upon them, and that too from the very persons whose favour they had so impiously courted. In the space of forty years, God executed upon them the most signal vengeance: he inflicted upon them the judgment he had warned them of: and made use of the Roman armies "miserably to destroy those murderers, and to burn up their city*."]]

But we are told that Caiaphas "spake this not of himself." He meant indeed what he said; but his words bear a very different construction,

II. As dictated by God—

Since the Jews had been brought under the Roman yoke, the high priesthood, instead of being continued to the end of life, was changed as often as the interests of the Roman government appeared to require it. It now happened, that, notwithstanding Annas, the predecessor of Caiaphas, was yet alive, Caiaphas was high-priest. And, as God in former times had enabled the high-priests, by means of the Urim and Thummim, to declare his will, it pleased him now so to overrule the mind of Caiaphas, that he should utter a

* Matt. xxi. 38—41. and xxii. 7.

prophecy, when of himself he designed nothing more than to give the most impious advice. And though this was certainly a remarkable instance of God's interposition, it was by no means singular: for none of the prophets fully understood the import of their own words^f: some prophesied without any direct intention on their part^g; and others, in words most opposite to their own wishes^h.

In this prophecy he unwittingly declared,

1. The end of Christ's death—

[Be astonished, O heavens! this inveterate enemy of Christ, at the very moment when he proposed that he should be put to death, proclaimed, that *it was not for his own sins, but for the good of others!* How careful was God to clear the innocence of his Son, when, in addition to this wretched pontiff, he stirred up Judas who betrayed him, and Pilate who condemned him, and one of the malefactors that suffered with him, and the centurion who superintended his execution, to unite their testimony to this effect! With this prophecy of Caiaphas agree those of Daniel and Isaiah, that "the Messiah was to be cut off, but *not for himself*ⁱ;" that he was to be "wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities^k." Yes, "he died, the just for the unjust^l:" he was a propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world^m."]

2. The efficacy of it—

[Caiaphas intimated, that if this Jesus were put to death, all cause of fear would cease, and the whole nation would enjoy both peace and safety. Blessed truth! provided only we believe in Jesus: we then indeed have nothing to fear from those who have enslaved us, or from those who seek our ruin: sin, Satan, death, and hell shall all be disarmed of their power. The whole Israel of God, wheresoever "scattered," are the nation of whom Caiaphas unwittingly spake: they are "a holy nation:" they are interested in all that Christ has done or suffered: they "are gathered into the one" great community; partakers of one heavenly nature; members of one mystical body; and heirs of one eternal gloryⁿ. Caiaphas, thy words are true; "they are tried to the uttermost;" that Jesus, whom thou persecutedst, "has by death destroyed death,

^f Compare Ps. xxii. 16—18. with 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

^g 1 Sam. x. 10—12.

^h Numb. xxii. 38. with xxiv. 10.

ⁱ Dan. ix. 26.

^k Isai. liii. 5.

^l 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^m 1 John ii. 2.

ⁿ Rev. v. 9.

and delivered those who were all their life-time subject to bondage °.]

INFER—

1. How mysterious is the providence of God!

[That act which was *in itself* the most atrocious that ever was committed, was *in its effects* the best! How deep a mystery! the life of the world secured by the death of God's only Son! But so it is still: "God's ways are in the great deep:" and the very efforts which are made by men and devils for the destruction of his people, are instrumental to their establishment and growth in grace. And the time shall come when all the saints shall see as much reason to bless God for the malice exercised towards themselves in particular, as now they see to adore him for the accomplishment of his word in and by the Lord Jesus.]

2. How rich his grace!

[For whom was it that Jesus died? it was "for *that* nation;" that nation that abused so many mercies, and persecuted so many prophets, and imbrued their hands in the blood of God's only Son! Even Caiaphas himself, with all that were concerned in that unparalleled transaction, were free to accept of mercy, and, by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their souls, to be cleansed from the guilt of shedding it. Nor are *we* excluded from the benefit. Whatever guilt we may have contracted, the way is open for us, if we desire reconciliation with our offended God: "Not one that comes to him shall ever be cast out." Let this grace, this "exceedingly rich grace," fill us with astonishment, and be now, as it certainly will be in the eternal world, the subject of our incessant praise.]

° Heb. ii. 14, 15.

MDCLXXI.

OUR LORD'S VIEWS OF HIS OWN DEATH.

John xii. 23, 24. *Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

THE nearer our Lord's death approached, the more he delighted to speak of it. So far from

regarding it as an object of terror, he was longing for its accomplishment. To his Disciples he had frequently declared the precise manner of it, together with all its antecedent indignities; and now he declares it to some strangers, whom curiosity had led to visit him.

Whether those strangers were Jews or heathens, is not agreed: but from the general use of the term which we translate "*Greeks*," and from the difficulty which the Disciples felt about introducing them to Jesus, we apprehend that they were heathens, who had been proselyted to the worship of the true God, but were not become Jews by circumcision. Jesus had forbidden his Disciples to enter into any cities of the Gentiles, when he sent them out to preach his Gospel; and therefore they might well doubt the propriety of introducing Gentiles to him; which Philip did not venture to do, till he had conferred with Andrew, and consulted Jesus himself also on the point. When, however, they were brought to him, he advertised them of his approaching death, which he represented as *a source of honour to himself, and of benefit to man*. In these two views we shall consider it,

I. As a source of honour to himself—

He speaks not of being *crucified*, but *glorified*: for his death was indeed a *glory* to him:

1. As atoning for the sins of the whole world—

[This is the true light wherein to view his death: it was a sacrifice for sin, for the sins of all mankind: and it perfectly satisfied all the demands of law and justice, so that "God may be just and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus"—— View the death of Christ in this light, and say whether his crown of thorns were not his brightest diadem; and the cross on which he expired, his most glorious throne? Men indeed saw nothing but shame in his crucifixion; but God and angels beheld it replete with glory* — — —]

2. As opening a way for the salvation of all mankind—

* John xiii. 31.

[Being "lifted up, he was to draw all men unto him^b." He was the true "Shiloh, unto whom the gathering of the people should be." Had he been the Saviour of Jews only, it had been comparatively a light matter; but being God's salvation to the ends of the earth, he was most glorious in the eyes of God himself^c. Behold, now already was he reaping the first-fruits of that harvest which was soon to be gathered in: the solicitude of these Greeks to be made acquainted with him was an earnest of that more extended dominion which he was speedily to possess. And who can reflect on "his erecting thus his standard to the nations," and not acknowledge "his rest to be glorious^d?" Indeed this gathering of the people to him is represented by the prophets as constituting the summit of his glory^e — — — and he himself is "satisfied with all the travail of his soul, when he reaps this as its appointed fruit." But the songs of the redeemed in heaven are the best evidence of this unquestionable truth^f.]

Our Lord next speaks of his death,

II. As a source of benefit to man—

The illustration here used is familiar to all: every one knows that a grain of wheat, if left exposed upon a rock will be unproductive; but that if buried in the earth, it will corrupt, and vegetate, and bring forth fruit. Now to this our Lord compares his death.

If he had not died, he would not have proved a Saviour to any—

[If he had not died, there would have been no atonement made, no sin forgiven, no soul of man delivered. There was no other way in which God could have been reconciled to his sinful creatures, consistently with his justice, holiness, and truth — — — In vain would Christ himself have become incarnate, if he had not died: in vain would he have fulfilled the law himself, and set us a perfect example of obedience: if he had not completed the work by his death, the demands of law and justice had been still unsatisfied, and every child of Adam must have perished. As for any attempt on our part to supply the deficiency, either by repentance or amendment, it would have answered no purpose; it would have left us under the curses of the broken law — — —]

But by his death millions obtain life—

^b ver. 32.

^c Isai. xlix. 5, 6.

^d Isai. xi. 10

^e Isai. lv. 5. and lx. 8, 9.

^f Rev. vii. 9—14.

[It is not thirty, or sixty, or a hundredfold, that that grain of corn produces, but millions, innumerable as the sands upon the sea-shore: "the fruit of it shall shake like Lebanon, and they that spring up from it in the city, shall be as the piles of grass upon the earth^s. Think of the fruit produced by it in the apostolic age, and that which is yet growing from it in every quarter of the globe, and that which will arise in the Millennium, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea: truly it will at last be a multitude, which no man can number, out of every kindred, and nation, and tongue, and people; all growing upon his root, all deriving life from his stem, all assimilated to his image, and all treasured up at last in the same garner! And is one single soul of such value, that the whole world is as nothing in comparison of it? What then is the benefit arising to mankind from the death of Christ! how vast! how extensive! how incalculable!]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are inquiring after Jesus—

[If any are saying, like these Greeks, "Sir, we would see Jesus," we bless God who has put that desire into their hearts: and we shall be glad to be instrumental in any respect in introducing them to him. Of one thing we can confidently assure them, that there no longer exists any barrier to their admission to his presence, provided they desire in sincerity of heart to devote themselves to his service: whatever be their nation, their profession, their character, they are alike welcome, if they come with penitence and faith; and may be assured, that "he will in no wise cast them out." Would they know what he would principally commend to their attention? we answer, he would direct them to consider his death as the most stupendous display of his love, and an inexhaustible source of blessings to their souls. Reflect then, ye inquiring people, on the Saviour's love, and give him the glory due unto his name.]

2. Those who profess themselves his followers—

[As Jesus had frequently told his own Disciples that they must be ready to lay down their lives for him, so he now declared to these strangers, that these were the only terms on which he would accept them as his people. The wheat must resemble that from which it sprang; and the Disciples be conformed to the image of their Lord. Nor must they only be willing to suffer like him, but *must account those sufferings their glory*. This was the practice of the Apostles; and must be the practice of all who would adorn the Gospel^h. We

^s Ps. lxxii. 16.

^h Acts v. 41.

should feel no difficulty in pronouncing *him* honoured and glorified, who should be irradiated with a glory, like Moses, or have the Holy Ghost lighting visibly on him, as once he did on the Apostles: with equal confidence then may we pronounce *him* glorified, who bears his cross after Jesus; for "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon him¹." Remember then, brethren, that these are the terms on which Christ acknowledges you as his; and "arm yourselves with the mind that was in him." Be content to "suffer with him; and then you shall also be glorified together."]

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

MDCLXXII.

THE BENEFIT OF FOLLOWING CHRIST.

John xii. 26. *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*

THE Christian's life is certainly a life of difficulty and self-denial, not only as being contrary to our natural inclinations, but as exposing us to the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world. From the very days of Cain to this present moment, the wicked have hated, reviled, and persecuted the just. The prophets were all, without exception, treated with great malignity. The Apostles were deemed as "the very filth of the world, and as the off-scouring of all things," both by their own people the Jews, and by the Gentiles in every place. Our blessed Lord himself, in whom no fault whatever could be found, was an object of "abhorrence to his whole nation," and was put to death by them as the vilest and most odious of malefactors. And we also are taught to expect similar treatment at the hands of those amongst whom we live. Nor are we at liberty to shun the cross by any relaxation of our principles, or by any deviation from the path of duty. Our Lord tells us plainly, that "he who loveth his life shall lose it; and that he only who hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." But if this appear

^a ver. 25.

hard, the encouragement which our Lord affords us is amply sufficient for the support of our minds. His injunction is, "If any man serve me, let him follow me," even unto death. And for his encouragement I assure him, that where I am there shall also my servant be: yea, if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

Here we have, on the most unquestionable authority,

I. Our duty set before us.

II. Our encouragement to perform it.

I. Our duty is to "serve" the Lord Jésus Christ, "whose we are and whom therefore we are bound to serve." But how must we serve him? Our Lord says, "If any man serve me, let him follow me:" Let him follow me,

As his Teacher, to instruct him. 4

As his Master, to rule him.

As his Saviour, to save him.

As his Example, whereby to regulate the whole of his conduct.

We must follow Christ *as our Teacher*, to instruct us. "Christ is a Teacher come from God." He has "left the bosom of his Father, and come down to earth to declare him to us," and to make known to us his mind and will. In particular, He is come to inform us what plan his heavenly Father has devised for the restoration of a guilty world to his favour; and in what way they must walk so as to please and honour him. And he expects that we come to him with the docility of little children, and receive instruction from his lips: "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly in heart;" that is, 'Learn of me, for I can bear with your infirmities, and will carefully convey instruction to you as you are able to receive it.' It was in this way that Mary sat at his feet, whilst her more earthly-minded sister Martha was cumbered about providing for the guests whom she was about to entertain: and this was "the good

^b Matt. xi. 29.

part" which Mary chose, and which, our Lord assured her, should never be taken from her. To inculcate this lesson, and to induce this habit, was the real scope of our Lord's address to the Rich Youth, who desired to know what he must do in order to obtain eternal life. Our Lord told him to "keep the commandments." And, when the Young Man, ignorant of their spiritual import, affirmed that he had kept them all from his youth up, our Lord said to him, "Go and sell all thou hast, and come and follow me; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven^c;" by which he meant, not that the sacrifice of earthly treasures would purchase those which are eternal; but that by disencumbering his mind of earthly cares, and attending diligently on the instructions that should be given him, he should gradually be guided into all truth, and finally attain that eternal life about which he had professed so much concern. This is what our Lord requires at our hands also; and not a the commencement of our career only, but through out our whole lives. After he had taught his Disciples during the whole of his ministerial life, even after he was risen again from the dead, he both "expounded to them out of the prophets all that related to himself," and "opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures^d:" and in like manner must we, to the latest hour of our lives, come to him for the illumination of our minds by his word and Spirit. We shall still need the same teaching as at the first, and must come to him for that spiritual "eye-salve which he alone can give^e."

Next we must follow him *as our Master*, to rule us. "We call him Lord and Master; and we say well; for so he is." But "to what purpose shall we call him Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he says?" His word must be a law unto us at all times, and under all circumstances. There is no authority whatever that is to be regarded in comparison of his. When the Disciples were forbidden to preach in his name, they made this appeal to their Rulers;

^c Matt. xix. 21.

^d Luke xxiv. 44, 45.

^e Rev. iii. 18.

“Whether it be right to hearken unto you more **than** unto God, judge ye^f.” So whatever menaces be **used** to intimidate us, and to deter us from the path of **duty**, we must say with St. Paul, “None of these things **move** me, neither count I my life dear unto me^g,” so that I may but discharge the duty I owe unto my Lord, **and** approve myself to him as his faithful servant.

Further, we must follow him *as our Saviour*, to **save** us. There is no other Saviour, no other name under heaven given among men whereby we, or any **human** being, can be saved. It is he who has by the sacrifice of himself effected our reconciliation with our offended God: and he says, “Look unto me, and be ye **saved**, all the ends of the earth.” “As the serpent was **lifted** up in the wilderness that the wounded Israelites might look unto it and be healed, so,” says our Lord, “have I been **lifted** up, that whosoever shall believe in me may not perish, but may have eternal life^h.” But our eyes must be to him alone. We must not blend any thing with his all-sufficient merits. We must not look partly to ourselves and partly to him; for he will not endure any rival, or “give any part of his glory to another.” If St. Paul “desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christⁱ,” much more must we renounce all dependence on our own works, and seek to be justified by Christ alone. As in heaven there is but one song, “To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and the Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever;^k” so on earth must there be an entire and exclusive affiance in him for all the blessings of salvation.

Once more, we must follow him *as our Example*, to regulate the whole of our life and conversation. When he washed his Disciples’ feet, he declared, that he intended in this symbolical act to shew, how they were to demean themselves towards each other; and,

^f Acts iv. 19. and v. 29. ^g Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

^h John iii. 14, 15.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 9.

^k Rev. i. 5, 6.

by the example he then set them, to inculcate the necessity of their performing towards the meanest of their brethren every possible act of condescension and love¹. So by St. Peter we are informed, that under still more trying circumstances the Lord Jesus Christ "has set us an example that we should follow his steps," and more especially in those duties which are most difficult and self-denying. As "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, and when he was reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously^m; so we, under all the heaviest trials that can come upon us, are to suffer them with all meekness, "blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who despitefully use us, and persecute usⁿ;" our determination, through grace, must be, not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good^o. In a word, "the whole mind must be in us that was in Christ Jesus^p"; and under all imaginable circumstances we must approve ourselves as followers of Christ, walking as he walked^q, and doing only those things which will please and honour our Father which is in heaven. It must at all times be "our very meat to do his holy will^r."

Now this, I apprehend, is the import of those words, "If any man serve me, let him follow me:" 'let him follow me for all the ends and purposes for which I came into the world, that he may honour me before men, and become fully meet for all the blessedness which I will award unto him.'

To enforce this precept, our Lord adds the richest possible encouragement: "Where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

Now I would ask, Where was our Lord when he spake these words? In his human nature he was on earth; but in his divine nature he was in heaven. For thus he said to Nicodemus; "No man hath

¹ John xiii. 12—14.^m 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.ⁿ Matt. v. 44.^o Rom. xii. 21.^p Phil. ii. 5.^q 1 John ii. 6.^r John iv. 34.

ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven^{*}. And after our blessed Lord had completed on earth the work which his Father had given him to do, he was raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers, and was invested with a throne and a kingdom as the just recompence of his obedience unto death. 'Now' says our blessed Lord, 'such is the felicity that awaits all my obedient servants, and such the glory that shall be accorded to them.' Whilst he was yet on earth, he told them, that "he was going to heaven to prepare mansions for his obedient followers, and that in due time he would come again and receive them to himself that they might be with him, in a full enjoyment of his presence and glory[†]." He also made it a part of his intercessory prayer just before his death, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me[‡]." And St. Paul has told us, that at the last day the Lord Jesus will come again in power and great glory, and gather together his obedient people to "meet him in the air; that so they may be ever with the Lord[§]." At the instant of death shall this felicity be conferred on our souls, as on the dying thief in paradise; and at the day of judgment shall our bodies also be restored to life, that in union with our souls they may have a full and everlasting participation of this glory. Well, therefore, does the Apostle add, "Comfort ye one another with these words." And are there any circumstances under which these words must not administer comfort? The Lord Jesus glorified his Father when on earth: and now he is glorified with him[¶]. And, if we glorify God by following his dear Son, will he not glorify us also? Yes: he will honour us, even as he has honoured the Lord Jesus. He will acknowledge us as his beloved children before the whole assembled universe. He will exalt us to

* John iii. 13.

† John xiv. 2, 3.

‡ John xvii. 24.

§ 1 Thess. iv. 17.

¶ John xvii. 4, 5.

the kingdom which he has prepared for us before the foundation of the world. He will place us on the very same throne on which he has placed his Son^a: he will assign to us the office of judging the world, yea and of judging angels too, as assessors in judgment with him^a: and he will "give to us the very same glory which he has given to him^b." Doubtless in all this the Lord Jesus will have the pre-eminence, even as the sun, which is the fountain of light, has above the twinkling star, which emits only a borrowed radiance: but as far as what is finite can be compared with what is infinite, we shall enjoy in our measure the same blessedness and the same glory which Christ himself possesses; being "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^c."

Behold then what encouragement is here afforded us! Did Christ himself "for the joy that was set before him endure the cross and despise the shame, till he was called to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God^d?" Methinks we should do the same: we should account no commandment hard, nor any suffering grievous. We should consider ourselves as altogether devoted to the Lord Jesus, and "yield up both our bodies and our souls as living sacrifices to him^e," to be consumed, as it were, if he see fit, on his altar by the flames of martyrdom, but especially and above all by the fire of his love.

But who can conceive aright of this glory? We can form no idea of what it was to behold the Lord Jesus on Mount Tabor, when his glory shined above the brightness of the meridian sun: how much less can we conceive what it must be to "see him as he is" in glory! There he shines, not only in all the brightness of the Godhead, but in the tempered effulgence of the "Lamb that has been slain^f." There we shall see, not merely the glories of his nature, but all of them exhibiting in the brightest possible array the wonders of his love. There we

^a Rev. iii. 21.

^a 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3.

^b John xvii. 22, 23.

^c Rom. viii. 17.

^d Heb. xii. 2.

^e Rom. xii. 1.

^f Rev. v. 6.

shall behold him not merely as God, but as a Redeeming God, yea, as *our* Redeemer, and *our* God, and *our* portion for ever. Tell me, does not this afford us encouragement to serve him, and to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach?" Surely not life itself should be of any value, but to honour him with it. See what men will do for earthly advancement; what cares, what labours, what privations will they endure; if by any means they may obtain the favoured objects of their ambition! And shall we account much of any labours or sufferings which we may be called to endure in order to the attainment of this glory? I blush to think how stupid and brutish we all are: Methinks, that acknowledgment of Agur was but the just expression of his feelings, and well befits every one of us, "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man^a."

And now, my brethren, let us improve this subject, first in reference to ourselves, and next in reference to the mournful occasion before us.

In respect to ourselves, we are here of necessity called to inquire what *our* habits are, and what *our* prospects? Whose servants are we, and whom do we follow? The Apostle appeals to us, that "To whomsoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness¹." Let me ask you then, Whose sentiments you have adopted, and whose precepts you have followed? Do you not find, on a retrospect of your past lives, that you have adopted for the most part the maxims of a corrupt world, instead of receiving explicitly, and following exclusively, the commandments of your God? Let me further ask respecting your views of salvation: Have you seen and felt your utter incapacity to save yourselves, and "fled to Christ for refuge as to the hope set before you," renouncing every other ground of dependence, and relying altogether upon his blood and righteousness for your

^a Heb. xiii. 12, 13.

^b Prov. xxx. 2.

¹ Rom. vi. 16.

acceptance before God? And have you consecrated yourselves to God as his redeemed people, that, "having been bought with a price, you may glorify him with your body and in your spirit which are his?" And do those who are around you, behold in you such a resemblance to Christ, as constrains them to acknowledge you as his peculiar people, who have been brought by him out of darkness into marvellous light, and are shewing forth *his virtues* in the whole of your life and conversation^k? If you are really Christ's, you are "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men!" Now inquire whether it be so with you? for on this depends all the consolation which is here afforded us. I appeal to you, whether you can reasonably hope to be with Christ hereafter, if you do not serve him here; or, that God will honour you as his redeemed people in heaven, if you do not honour him in this world as his faithful servants? He has told you expressly, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed^m." Yes indeed, if the obedient shall come forth to everlasting life, the disobedient "will awake only to shame and everlasting contemptⁿ." Of this there can be no doubt. I will appeal even to the most confident amongst you, Do you yourselves believe, that God will put no "difference between those who serve him and those who serve him not?" You cannot but know that he will act as a righteous Judge, though you are unwilling to regard this truth in reference to yourselves with all the solemnity that it deserves. Behold then, ye servants of the world, ye stand altogether self-condemned. Ye know, and must know, that God will recompense men according to their works; and that "they only who seek for glory and honour, and immortality, can ever have eternal life." Suffer me then to ask, IF IN THE ETERNAL WORLD YE BE NOT WITH CHRIST in heaven, where, and WITH WHOM WILL YE BE? Oh! this is an awful question. I pray you

^k 1 Pet. ii. 9. the Greek.^l 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. ^m 1 Sam. ii. 30.ⁿ Dan. xii. 2.^o Mal. iii. 18.

to answer it to your own souls. To the Jews who rejected him, our Lord said, "Whither I go ye cannot come:" so must I say to you who make it not the one end of your lives to serve and honour him: "Ye shall die in your sins; and where Christ is, ye cannot come²." I pray you, lay this to heart, and give up yourselves to him without delay, as his willing and devoted servants.

In reference to the mournful occasion on which we are assembled³, one sentiment pervades us all; viz. that our loss is our brother's gain. Our loss is indeed great. To his bereaved family it is irreparable, except as the bereavement may bring them, as I hope it will, to God, and be the means of spiritual and eternal welfare to their souls. To the Church of God the loss will be exceeding great. Who, that has known our departed brother from the first moment that he undertook to advocate the cause of God's ancient people, must not bear witness to his unremitting zeal and diligence in this high calling? Truly in labours has he been very abundant; as all who have been connected with "the London Society" can witness. In truth, it is wonderful how a person, not naturally robust, should have been able to sustain all his diversified labours and fatigues. In all his counsels and deportment, they who have seen the most of him will attest, that he has manifested, in no ordinary degree, the meekness of wisdom, and rendered incalculable service to the cause in which he has been so long engaged. To the children in the schools he has been a parent from the beginning; nor can we doubt but that several of them, who have died in the faith of Christ, will be "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for ever and ever. O that God may be pleased to raise up another like unto him, endued with the same holy zeal and heavenly disposition! As for himself, we cannot but congratulate him rather than condole with him. If St. Paul accounted it

² John viii. 21.

³ The Funeral of the Rev. C. S. Hawtrej, July 27, 1831.

¹ The Society formed for the Conversion of the Jews.

"better to depart and be with Christ," than to protract the most favoured existence upon earth, no doubt our departed brother feels this realized in himself at this time. Who can conceive what blessedness he now enjoys in the presence of his Saviour, and in the very bosom of his God? Could we but now behold the crown of glory placed upon his head, and the throne on which he is seated at the right hand of God, and could we appreciate the transports of his soul in singing the praises of his redeeming God, we should not wish him back in the midst of us, but should congratulate him, saying, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." The office that remains for us, is, to "follow him, as he followed Christ," and to stand ready for that summons which all of us must ere long receive; that, whenever it be sent, we may be found "with our loins girt and our lamps trimmed," and may receive that welcome which has been vouchsafed to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

MDCLXXIII.

CHRIST'S RESIGNATION.

John xii. 27, 28. *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.*

THE sight of one in affliction necessarily produces some emotion of pity in our breasts, if we be not dead to all the feelings of humanity. But if there be majesty in distress, and that majesty be accompanied with consummate goodness, we take a deeper interest in all the circumstances exhibited to our view. Behold then a spectacle, such as the world never saw before, never will see again! a sufferer, infinitely superior to the highest archangel in dignity and worth! a suffering God! Let us draw nigh with reverence, and learn from his own lips,

I. The depth of his troubles—

Man had not yet touched his body; nor, whatever

weight we may give to his apprehension of bodily sufferings, can we suppose that it was *that alone*, or *that chiefly*, which drew forth these bitter complaints.

His soul was now enduring the severest agonies—

[He particularly says, “Now is my *soul* troubled.” If it be asked, What was the source of his troubles? we answer, he was now *sustaining the wrath of God*, and *conflicting with all the powers of darkness*.

It had been foretold that the Father should bruise his Son^a, and smite him with the sword^b of his inexorable justice. And now the season was come for the accomplishment of these prophecies. The wrath of God was the punishment due to sin: and that wrath Jesus was now enduring: yes; in order that he might redeem us from the curse of the law, he himself was become a curse^c.

But it had also been foretold that the “Serpent should bruise his heel^d.” And he himself had just before said, that the prince of this world was coming to assault him^e. Satan, when first our Lord entered on his ministry, had made repeated efforts to destroy him^f; and, though foiled and vanquished, he retreated only for a season^g, determining to renew his assaults with increased vigour. This therefore seeming an opportunity peculiarly favourable to his designs, he failed not to improve it. He summoned all his principalities and powers to unite their efforts^h: and O, how desperate was their attack! Our blessed Lord himself, though victorious in the conflict, had almost fainted, if angels had not been sent from heaven to succour and support himⁱ.]

Under these agonies he was reduced to the greatest embarrassment—

[Never was he embarrassed through the persecutions or cruelties of *man*: but when he endured the wrath of *God*, and the assaults of *Satan*, he could not but complain of his accumulated troubles: yea, so was he distressed, that he was at a loss what to say, or what to do. His nature dictated a prayer, which however he afterwards saw occasion to revoke. He begged that the cup might pass from him, and that he might be saved from that tremendous hour^k. Nor was this petition

^a Isai. liii. 10. first part.

^b Zech. xiii. 7.

^c Gal. iii. 10, 13.

^d Gen. iii. 15.

^e John xiv. 30. and xii. 31.

^f Luke iv. 2—12.

^g Luke iv. 13.

^h Col. ii. 15.

ⁱ Matt. iv. 11.

^k Some read the words with an interrogation; thus: “What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?” But our translation seems preferable, if we compare the account in Matt. xxvi. 38—42

in the least degree inconsistent with his fortitude or resignation. It shewed him to be a man; and it was such a petition as he might offer with perfect innocence; seeing that to dread and deprecate the wrath of God is not only lawful but our bounden duty.]

Recovering himself, however, he welcomes his afflictions, and states,

II. The grounds of his submission to them—

1. It was with a view to those very sufferings that he had come to that hour—

[These sufferings had been foreseen, when he first engaged to redeem a fallen world¹; and he had then stipulated to bear them for our sakes^m.] It was with a view to them that he had assumed our nature, without which he would have been incapable of bearing themⁿ. And throughout the whole of his ministry he had frequently adverted to them as what he should undergo, as soon as his hour was fully come^o. Yea, he had reproved Peter with great severity for attempting to dissuade him from his purpose^p: and had expressed his eager “desire to be baptized with that bloody baptism,” being greatly “straitened till it should be accomplished^q.” And would he now recede? would he shrink from the trial now it was come upon him? would he rescind his own voluntary engagements, and abandon the work he had undertaken? No: difficult as it was to submit to these sufferings, he determined to endure them, since the purposes of his grace could in no other way be accomplished.]

2. They were necessary for the promoting of his Father's glory—

[This is strongly intimated in the latter petition. The Father's *justice* could not have been so much glorified even in the destruction of the whole human race, as in the sufferings of his co-equal co-eternal Son: in these it appeared altogether inflexible. And how glorious would be the display of the Father's *love*, when it was seen that he had adopted such a method of restoring man to his favour! Yea, how would every perfection shine forth in this stupendous mystery! Would Jesus then sacrifice the Father's glory to his present feelings? When the Father had already glorified *him* by repeated attestations from heaven, and by so many miracles, would Jesus now draw back, and rob the Father of all the

¹ Isai. liii. 10. latter part.

ⁿ Heb. ii. 9, 14, 15.

^p Matt. xvi. 21—23

^m Ps. xl. 7, 8.

^o Luke xviii. 32, 33.

^q Luke xii. 50.

glory that was to accrue to him from this dark and painful dispensation? No, by no means; and therefore he not only acquiesces in the appointment, but even prays, that, whatever he himself might endure, God would glorify his own name.]

This subject is capable of most useful IMPROVEMENT—

1. For the awakening of our fears—

[These sorrows were the just reward of our sins: and every one on whom sin shall be found must sustain them. Go then, ye who make a mock at sin, go follow at your ease the imaginations of your own hearts. Ye who think it unnecessary to repent of sin, go on in your impenitence; but consider, and learn, “if these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” If the curse due to sin so overwhelmed the Lord of glory himself in the space of one hour, what effect shall it produce on you to all eternity? Then no supplication can remove, nor any submission mitigate, our anguish. This, this alone, is the time for prayer. If then we would escape the wrath of Almighty God, let us flee instantly to this very Saviour, whose blood can cleanse us from the guilt of sin, and whose grace can rescue us from its dominion.]

2. For the encouraging of our hopes—

[What do we owe to the adorable Saviour, for that, in the hour of his extremity, he did not recede? But he saved not himself, that he might save us: “He gave up his own life, that he might ransom us;” and drank, even to the dregs, the cup of bitterness, that he might take it out of our hands for evermore. Let all then rest assured, that the debt once discharged by our great Surety, shall never be required at our hands, provided we believe in him.]

3. For the regulating of our conduct—

[There is no sin in praying for the removal of afflictions, provided we be willing, on the whole, that God’s will should be done in preference to our own. But, when we see what the Lord’s will is, we must say, “The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?” We must desire above all things the glory of God: and cheerfully acquiesce in any dispensation, provided God may be honoured by it.]

• Luke xxiii. 31.

MDCLXXIV.

THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

John xii. 31, 32. *Now is the judgment of this world : now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

INCONCEIVABLY arduous was the work which Christ had undertaken: yet amidst his heaviest trials his confidence never for a moment forsook him. He had just complained of the insupportable weight of his mental agonies; yet not so complained, but that he had desired his heavenly Father to glorify his own name, whatever sufferings he might have to endure for that end. For the satisfaction of those who would otherwise have drawn wrong conclusions from those sufferings, the Father answered him by a voice like thunder, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again:" and immediately Jesus, with his wonted calmness, resumed his discourse respecting the nature and necessity of his approaching death, and confidently predicted,

I. The issue of his conflicts—

The world and Satan were his great adversaries: and though by his death they would appear victorious over him, yet he declared that by his death,

1. The world would be judged—

[What we are to understand by "the judgment of this world," we cannot absolutely determine: but we apprehend the import of that expression to be, that his death would be the means of exhibiting in the clearest view, first, *the wickedness*, and next, *the desert* of the ungodly world.

Who would have conceived *the wickedness* of the world to be so great as it really is? Who would have conceived, that, if God himself should become incarnate, and sojourn in a familiar manner upon earth, and cause the light of his perfections to shine around him, and diffuse innumerable blessings by the unbounded exercise of omnipotence and love, his creatures should rise up against him, and put him to death? Who would conceive too, that this should be done, not by ignorant savages, but by the people who had enjoyed the light of revelation, heard his gracious instructions, beheld his bright example, and received the benefit of his miraculous exertions: yea, that it

should be done too, not by the inconsiderate vulgar, but by the rulers themselves, and by the priests and ministers of God's sanctuary? This shews what human nature itself is, even under the greatest possible advantages: and humiliating is the picture which it exhibits to us.

But *the desert* also of the world is manifested to us in the death of Christ: for Christ suffered the penalty due to sin: "to redeem us from the curse of the law, he became a curse:" and all the misery that he endured both in body and soul as our surety and substitute, was our deserved portion. He indeed, by reason of his office, could endure it but for a time: but the soul that perishes in sin, must endure it to all eternity. Death, which to him was the period of his release, will be to the condemned soul the commencement of its sorrows, of sorrows that shall endure to all eternity. The hidings of God's face and the sense of his wrath will be co-existent with the soul itself.]

2. The prince thereof would be cast out—

[Satan is called the prince, and the god, of this world, because he exercises an universal government over men who are his willing subjects^a. That which has given him this power is *sin*: on account of *sin*, God has delivered men into his hands as their jailor and their executioner. But Jesus Christ has "finished transgression and made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness;" and has thus rescued from the hands of Satan a countless multitude, who shall be eternal monuments of his electing love and his redeeming power. Whilst yet he hanged on the cross, the Lord Jesus "bruised the serpent's head^b;" yea, "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly upon the cross^c." At that moment did "Satan fall from heaven as lightning:" and though he still retains a sway over the children of disobedience, yet he is forced continually to give up his vassals to the Lord Jesus, and is made to flee from those^d whom he lately "led captive at his will." Moreover, the time is shortly coming, (yea, in the Divine purpose it was, as it were, then present,) when he shall be bound in chains of everlasting darkness, and be cast into that "lake of fire" which has from the beginning been "prepared for him and for his angels."]

Next, our Lord predicts,

II. The triumphs of his grace—

By being "lifted up from the earth" was meant,

^a Eph. ii. 2. 2 Cor. iv. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^c Col. ii. 15.

^b Gen. iii. 15.

^d Jam. iv. 7.

his crucifixion. The expression refers to the lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, which was a type and emblem of the death of Christ*. The Evangelist himself tells us, that our Lord intended to intimate the peculiar kind of death which he was to suffer: and the people themselves understood him as speaking of his removal from them by death†. Nor did his words convey the idea of uncertainty, which seems intimated in our translation: the event was fixed in the Divine counsels from all eternity; and he spoke of it as certainly to be accomplished‡.

Here then are two things to be noted;

1. The event predicted—

[Christ will “draw all men to himself:” He is that “Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be;” and we see on the day of Pentecost the commencement of this great and glorious work. Would we understand precisely the import of the expression, there we behold it exemplified in the clearest view — — — We must not indeed imagine that every individual of mankind will be drawn to Christ; for in every age many have rejected him: but some of all nations, professions, and characters, shall be drawn to him; and at last they shall be found a multitude that no man can number^h — — —]

2. The manner in which it shall be accomplished—

[Men are not drawn to him like stocks and stones, but in a way consistent with the perfect exercise of their own free will. The power indeed is Christ's; and it is exerted with effect: but it is made effectual,

First, *by shewing men their need of him*. The eyes of all the wounded Israelites were drawn to the brazen serpent in the wilderness: they felt that they were dying of their wounds; they knew that no human efforts could heal them; and they were assured that a sight of that brazen serpent would effect their cure. This attraction was sufficient: they looked and were healed. Thus the jailor saw his own perishing condition, and asked, “What shall I do to be saved?” and was glad to embrace the Saviour proposed to himⁱ. This is universally the first operation of Christ's victorious grace.

Next, he draws men *by the attractive influences of his grace*. Because men know not how the Holy Spirit works upon the

* Compare Numb. xxi. 8, 9. with John iii. 14, 15.

† ver. 33, 34.

‡ *ἐὰν* should be “when,” and not “if.”

^h Dan. vii. 13, 14.

ⁱ Acts xvi. 30, 31.

souls of men, they are ready to doubt, or even deny, **his operations**. But who doubts the agency of the wind? yet **no man** knows whence it comes, or whither it goes. It is visible in its effects, and therefore its operation is acknowledged, notwithstanding it is involved in the deepest mystery. Why then should the operation of the Holy Spirit be doubted, merely because *the mode* of his agency is not understood^k? Were it possible to question the evidence of our senses, we should deny the virtue of the loadstone, and represent any one as weak or wicked who should profess to believe it. But we behold its effects; and our incredulity is vanquished. So then must we confess the agency of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men, though we cannot comprehend every thing respecting it. Our Lord has told us, that "no man can come unto him, except the Father draw him^l:" and the Psalmist affirms, that God makes us "willing in the day of his power^m." It is sufficient for us to know, that he draws us rationally, "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love."

Lastly, he draws men *by discovering to them the wonders of his love*. Let but a glimpse of his incomprehensible love be seen, and every thing in the whole creation will be darkened: just as a view of the meridian sun renders every other object invisible. Paul tells us, that "the love of Christ constrained him:" it carried him away like a mighty torrent: nor will the soul of any man who feels it, be either able or desirous to withstand its influence. As well might the angels in heaven be averse to serve their God, as the man that has tasted of redeeming love.

In this way then does the grace of Christ prevail; and in this way shall it triumph to the ends of the earth.]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek to experience the attractions of his grace—

[Nothing under heaven is so desirable as this — — —
Say then, with the Church of old, "Draw me, and I will run after theeⁿ" — — —]

2. Fear not the counteracting influence of men or devils—

[Men may oppose you, and vaunt themselves against you: but they are already "judged" by the word of God; and, if they repent not, they shall be judged by the same at the tribunal of their God. If they do not themselves become such despised creatures as they esteem you to be, they will ere long "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."

^k John iii. 8.

^m Ps. cx. 3.

^l John vi. 44.

ⁿ Cant. i. 4.

Satan too may harass you: but he is a vanquished enemy: yea, he too "is judged^a:" and though, "as a roaring lion, he seeketh to devour you," you are provided with armour, whereby you may withstand him^b; and you have the promise of God, that "he shall be shortly bruised under your feet"^c — — —]

* John xvi. 11.

^b Eph. vi. 11—13.

^c Rom. xvi. 20.

MDCLXXV.

THE DUTY OF WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

John xii. 35, 36. *Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.*

THE perverseness of men in resisting the means of conviction, is apt to beget an asperity in the minds of their instructors, and to make them cease from their labours of love. But we are required "in meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves." And our blessed Lord affords us in this respect an admirable example. He had plainly told the Jews, that he must be crucified: and their very answer shews, that they understood his meaning. But, instead of receiving the information aright, they cavilled at it, and concluded from thence, that he could not be the Messiah^a. Our Lord did not judge it proper at that time to afford them any farther means of conviction, when they had so abused those that were already afforded them: but he most affectionately warned them to improve their present advantages, before they should be finally withdrawn from them.

The words being equally applicable to us, we shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

Christ is here spoken of as "the light"—

[We might consider the term "light" *in general*, as referring to the Gospel: but *here* it undoubtedly relates to Christ himself^b. He is justly characterized by this name, not

^a ver. 32—34.

^b John i. 9. and viii. 12. and xii. 46.

only as being the eternal fountain of light, but as enlightening the world by his doctrines and life.]

“In him,” under this character, we are to “believe”—

[All that he has spoken respecting his person, work, and offices, together with all his promissory, or threatening declarations, should be received by us without gainsaying, and be relied upon without hesitation.]

“In him” also we ought to “walk”—

[We view earthly things in the light of the material sun; and avail ourselves of its light, every step we take. Precisely thus should we act with respect to Christ, “the Sun of Righteousness.” We should view sin and holiness, time and eternity, yea, every thing without exception, in the light that *HE*, by his word and conduct, reflects upon it. Nor should we take any one step in life, without a direct reference to his word as our rule, and his life as our example^c.]

To render this injunction more impressive, let us consider—

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

There are three topics mentioned in the text, from whence we may urge this important duty:

1. From the shortness of the time that we shall enjoy the light—

[The Jews now had the light; but it was to be extinguished within the space of four days. Hence our Lord *repeatedly* urges this consideration, “Walk, *while ye have the light*.” And how strongly does this argument apply to us! You have the light at present, yea, even greater light than the Jews enjoyed under the ministry of Christ: (for there were many subjects, which *he* did not fully open; and the things he did utter could not be perfectly understood, till the day of Pentecost; whereas you have Christ exhibited to you in all his glory; and the fulness, the freeness, the suitableness of his salvation constantly set before you.) But how soon may it be removed from you, or you from it^d! O then, “*while ye have the light*, believe, and walk, in the light.”]

2. From the danger we incur by disregarding the light—

[If we will not attend to the voice of Christ, a “darkness will come upon us,” even “darkness that may be felt.” They who never have had Christ preached unto them, are indeed in an awful condition; but by no means so awful as that of those

^c 1 John ii. 6.

^d Rev. ii. 5. Amos viii. 11, 12.

who have despised the Gospel*. The darkness of which the text speaks, is *judicial*, sent them by God as the punishment of their iniquity; and the very light that shines around them, serves only to increase their blindness, and to aggravate their guilt†. In this state, "they stumble at the noon-day," and wander, "not knowing whither they go;" till at last they fall into that pit of destruction, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for evermore.

Should not then the dread of such a state lead us to a just improvement of our present privileges?]

3. From the benefit arising to those who rightly improve the light—

[By "children of light," we may understand either *children of God* (who is light) or, *truly enlightened persons*‡. In either sense the general import is the same, namely, that, by believing in Christ, we shall attain the knowledge and enjoyment of God. Compare this state with that of those who are in darkness; and how great will this benefit appear!

Shall not then this blessed prospect allure us to embrace the Gospel? Or shall we still prefer sin and misery to holiness and glory?]

APPLICATION—

[Let us no longer withstand the solemn warnings and affectionate exhortations of the Lord Jesus; but improve to the utmost this accepted time, this day of salvation.]

* ver. 39, 40. † 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

‡ Thus *viol ἀπεθελας* is used Ephes. ii. 2.; and *ρέκνα καράρας*, 2 Pet. ii. 14. is so translated, as *viol φωρός* may be here.

MDCLXXVI.

THE DANGER OF LOVING THE PRAISE OF MEN.

John xii. 42, 43. *Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

IT seems astonishing to those who have ever considered the evidences of Christianity, that any one should hesitate to embrace it, or to acknowledge any one of its fundamental truths. But reason is by no means a certain guide, even in the things which come within its proper and legitimate sphere: it is too frequently biassed in its decisions, even when the

person himself is unconscious of any undue influence upon his mind. Evidence does not carry the **same** conviction to all: one is persuaded, whilst another doubts: the prejudices and passions of mankind operate to a great extent, and often leave demonstration itself almost without effect. Hence we find, that all the credentials with which our Lord confirmed his divine mission, were insufficient to produce conviction on the minds of many: as it is said, "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him^a." But by this the Scriptures themselves were fulfilled: for "Isaiah had said, Who hath believed our report; and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Yea, he had also declared, that on account of the perverseness and obstinacy with which many resisted the evidence set before them, they should be given over to judicial blindness and obduracy, so as to be incapable of estimating truth aright, or of embracing it when proposed to them^b. Even when reason is convinced, it does not always carry the affections along with it; but is often constrained to yield to the superior influence of some predominant lust. Thus it was with those spoken of in our text; who believed indeed that Jesus was the true Messiah, yet could not find in their hearts to acknowledge him in that character.

We propose to consider,

I. The conduct they pursued—

They had seen the miracles of our Lord, and were persuaded that he was the person spoken of in the prophets: yet, because the Pharisees had agreed to excommunicate any who should receive him as the Messiah, they dared not to confess him openly. Now this conduct was exceeding sinful. Of its constituent evils we may notice,

1. The dissimulation—

[The use of knowledge is to direct our ways: for the sake of our practice therefore we should be careful to acquire just sentiments. If our opinions be doubtful, we should try them;

^a ver. 37.

^b ver. 38—40.

if erroneous, renounce them; if true, we should regulate our lives according to them. To act contrary to the convictions of our mind is unworthy of a rational Being. We all know in what a contemptible light that man appears, who for the sake of human applause pretends to religion, whilst the world and sin are predominant in his heart: and equally contemptible is he, who, with the knowledge of the truth in his head, is deterred by the fear of man from yielding to its influence. Indeed the latter species of dissimulation seems the worse of the two, inasmuch as to disclaim what is good, is worse than to express an approbation of it. At all events, it is marked with a decisive testimony of God's abhorrence; "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin^c."

2. The ingratitude—

[The gift of God's only dear Son to die for us is the greatest that God himself could bestow upon us: for from *that* the Apostle infers the unquestionable willingness of God to give us all other things, seeing that all other things together are not to be compared with that^d. Now to know that God has bestowed that gift upon us, and yet not dare to confess it, is the basest ingratitude that can be imagined — — — And if it be ingratitude towards the Father, so is it also towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who voluntarily undertook the great work of our redemption. Reflect a moment on this: think of his pitying our undone condition, and leaving the bosom of his Father, in order that he might assume our nature, and die in our stead — — — What incomprehensible love was this! and what a base wretch must he be, who, believing that Christ has so loved him as to give himself for him, is afraid to confess it openly! To all such persons, well may that indignant expostulation be applied, "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise?"^e]

3. The impiety—

[Wherein can any man be guilty of more flagrant rebellion against God, than in *knowingly* and *deliberately* denying his dear Son? The command of God respecting the submitting to his Son is positive, and enforced with a very awful menace^f. What an act of defiance then is he guilty of, who against the convictions of his own conscience denies him! What cruelty also is he guilty of towards his fellow-creatures! Men are influenced greatly by example, especially by the example of those in higher life: the lower classes are ready to suppose that the rich and learned must know better than

^c Jam. iv. 17.

^d Rom. viii. 32.

^e Deut. xxxii. 6.

^f Deut. xviii. 18, 19. with Acts iii. 22, 23.

they, and with a blind confidence to embrace or reject sentiments solely on the authority of *their* opinions. Hence the timid dissembler is the means of deceiving many souls; and involves himself in the double guilt of destroying others together with himself. The man who rejects Christ for want of conviction, will "be beaten with few stripes;" but the man who rejects him contrary to his convictions, will "be beaten with many stripes^c:" the one "dashes himself against a rock that will break his bones;" the other will have "that rock fall upon him, which will grind him to powder^h."

That we may be able to account for such strange conduct, let us consider,

II. The principle by which they were actuated—

They acted from a regard for the good opinion of men. But the praise of men runs not in the same channel with the praise of Godⁱ; and they unhappily gave the applause of man the preference. Now this love of man's applause is,

1. A common principle—

[The moment that we begin to be impressed with a sense of eternal things, we begin to consider, what men will say, if we betray our feelings to the world. Though we should have never paid much attention to the sentiments of others before, we shall now feel the emotions of fear and shame: we shall contrive how we may reconcile the performance of our duties with a conformity to the customs and habits of the world; and shall often strain our conscience to make compliances with the world, in order to escape reproach on account of our singularity. It may be thought that persons who move in a higher sphere should have learned to divest themselves of this principle; but the higher any men are in society, the more they are influenced by the opinions of the world: they set a higher value on man's applause, and feel conscious that their actions are more open to remark. They of whom our text speaks, were "chief rulers:" they conceived that they had much to lose; and they well knew that their rank would not screen them from the assaults of religious intolerance. They might have indulged *vices* with impunity; those would have been connived at, even by Pharisees themselves; but *piety* in them would have been an unpardonable offence, which the very refuse of the people would have been forward to resent. But, though this principle is peculiarly operative on the great, it is not confined to them: we all feel it working in our own

^c Luke xii. 47, 48.

^h Luke xx. 17, 18.

ⁱ Rom. ii. 29.

bosoms, and have need to be on our guard against its malignant influence.]

2. A foolish principle—

[What can the applause of man do for us? it is a mere breath of air, that vanishes in a moment: but the approbation of God is of incalculable importance, since according to that will our eternal state be fixed. To many, the choice of Moses would appear unwise: to refuse the first honours of the Egyptian court, and participate rather in the afflictions of the oppressed Israelites! to “esteem the reproach of Christ as riches, yea as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt¹!” this might be regarded as folly by the ignorant Egyptians; but to us who know how to appreciate such conduct, it appears an act of consummate wisdom. Look at the rulers of whom we are speaking: suppose that all the consequences which they dreaded had come upon them; what would the anathemas of men have been, in comparison of God’s displeasure? and what an expulsion from the synagogue, in comparison of a rejection from heaven? If the whole world cannot compensate for the loss of a soul, surely they must be fools indeed who barter away their souls for the breath of man’s applause.]

3. A fatal principle—

[God himself has told us, that it is absolutely incompatible with saving faith; “How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only¹?” And we may appeal to all, whether it does not chill every devout affection, and impede the exercise of every Christian grace? What its ultimate effect will be, our blessed Lord has warned us; “If we confess him, he will confess us; but if we are ashamed of him and deny him, he also will be ashamed of us, and deny us, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his holy angels².”]

ADDRESS—

1. The secret and timid disciples—

[We do not put you all upon a level; for even where the outward conduct is the same, the inward principle may be widely different. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were not so open in their acknowledgment of Christ as they should have been³; but, when a necessity occurred for making known their sentiments, they rose to the occasion, and avowed their attachment to him more boldly than the Apostles themselves. We mean not to express any approbation of their previous

¹ Heb. xi. 24—26.

² Mark viii. 38.

¹ John v. 44. Gal. i. 10.

² John iii. 2. and xix. 38.

timidity; but to intimate, that an essential difference may be found, where none externally appears; and that God may have his "hidden ones" even among those who are as yet too much entangled by prudential considerations. It is not however by such examples that we are to regulate our conduct. Our duty is clear: the heart and the mouth are to be alike consecrated unto God; the one, to exercise faith on Christ, the other, to confess him to the world: and as the mouth without the heart will be an unacceptable offering to the Lord, so also will the heart without the mouth^o.]

2. Those who are suffering for confessing him—

[We are far from despising the approbation of men; but we account it of no value, any longer than it can be enjoyed with a good conscience. That in which alone we are materially interested is, the plaudit of our God: and if only he say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants," we need not be concerned, whatever may have been the judgment of men concerning us. Are any of you reproached for the sake of Christ; be not grieved, but rather rejoice^p; for "it turns unto you for a testimony^q." Great is the encouragement which God himself affords you in his word^r; and glorious is the prospect that awaits you at your departure hence^s. Be strong then, and of good courage; knowing, that if your faith be subjected to heavy trials at the present, "it shall be to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ^t."]]

^o Rom. x. 8—10.

^p 1 Pet. iv. 14.

^q Luke xxi. 13.

^r Isai. li. 7, 8.

^s Isai. lxvi. 5.

^t 1 Pet. i. 7.

MDCLXXVII.

MEN JUDGED BY THE GOSPEL.

John xii. 48. *He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*

THE judgment of the last day is a period to which we must all look forward with the deepest interest, and for which we should be preparing from day to day: for then "we shall receive at the Lord's hands according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." True it is, our Lord says, in the verse before my text, "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." But we

are not to understand this absolutely: for we are told expressly, that "God has committed all judgment to the Son;" and that "he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained." The meaning is, that "to save the world" was the great and primary object of his mission; and that, though he will also judge the world, he will not do it arbitrarily, according to any *secret will* of his own, but according to his *revealed will*, even with that word which, from day to day, he declared unto them. Of their reception of this word they should give account; and in strict accordance with it should his judgment be passed upon them.

In confirmation of this truth, I will shew,

I. The responsibility of those who hear the Gospel—

[Man is responsible to God for every talent that has been committed to him, and for every advantage he enjoys. In proportion to the opportunities which men have of knowing their Lord's will, must be their accountableness for the performance of it: and more or fewer stripes will be awarded to the negligent servant, according to the degree of information which had been given him, and the knowledge he possessed^a. "The times of men's ignorance God winked at; but, when his fuller revelation was made known to them, he called upon them more authoritatively to repent^b." The uninstructed "heathen will be judged by the law written on their hearts^c;" the Jews, by the law of the Ten Commandments^d; but Christians, by the Gospel^e. And a far more severe account will be required of us than of the others, on account of the superior light we have enjoyed. Our Lord told his hearers, that "if he had not come and spoken unto them, they had not (comparatively) had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin^f." And he warned them, that not only Tyre and Sidon, but even Sodom and Gomorrha, with all their wickedness, would have a lighter condemnation in the day of judgment, than those who neglected to improve the advantages afforded them by his instructions^g. This he plainly declared in the words of my text: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."]

^a Luke xii. 47, 48.

^b Acts xvii. 30.

^c Rom. ii. 14, 15.

^d Rom. ii. 12.

^e 2 Thess. i. 8.

^f John xv. 22.

^g Matt. x. 14, 15.

Here also we see,

II. The rule by which they shall be judged—

“The word that Christ spoke, the same shall judge,” both those who heard, and us who read it. We shall be judged by,

1. Its declarations—

[Nothing can be plainer than his declarations respecting the necessity of a new and heavenly birth^a, or the necessity of faith in him¹ — — — Now, in the last day these will appear against us: we cannot plead ignorance: the terms, in which these requirements were made known, were clear, peremptory, decisive; and if we have not obeyed them, we must take the bitter consequences of our neglect — — —]

2. Its invitations—

[These have been as free as our hearts could wish. Do we need to obtain rest in Christ? he says, “Come unto me, and I will give it you^k.” Do we need a new nature? he bids us to “take from him the water of life freely^l.” Have we any apprehension that he will not vouchsafe to us these blessings on account of our own unworthiness? he bids us receive them at his hands, “without money and without price^m.” Now these also will appear against us in judgment. And what excuse can we offer for not accepting them? Verily, we must confess, in that day, that “our ruin was of ourselves aloneⁿ,” and that we perished only because “we would not come to Christ for life^o.”]

3. Its promises—

[How “exceeding great and precious” are these! They are enlarged to the full extent of our necessities. What can we desire more than this, “Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast him out^p?” Here is no exception, either of character or condition. Whoever the person be, “the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse him from all sin^q,” yea, “though his sins have been red as crimson, they shall be made white as snow^r.” And what shall we say, when these appear in array against us on account of the contempt we poured upon them? Verily, our mouths will be shut, and not so much as a word of excuse can ever be offered by us.]

4. Its threatenings—

^a John iii. 3.

¹ John iii. 18, 36.

^k Matt. xi. 28.

^l Rev. xxii. 17.

^m Isai. lv. 1.

ⁿ Hos. xiii. 9.

^o John v. 40.

^p John vi. 37.

^q 1 John i. 7.

^r Isai. i. 18

[These are no less plain than any of the former^a: so that we can never plead ignorance, or a want of faithful admonition. And I appeal to you, whether all of these, the more awful as well as the more encouraging parts of Scripture, have not, in their season, been set before you with all fidelity? These, therefore, shall also be your judges in the last day. No arbitrary appointment of God shall determine your fate; but these very words, which you have so neglected and despised.]

And now, I PRAY YOU,

1. Examine how you have treated all these portions of Holy Writ^t — — —

2. Bear in mind your responsibility for the warning now given you — — —

^a Mark xvi. 16. Ps. ix. 17.

^t There is no medium between "a rejecting of Christ, and a cordial reception of his words." *See the text.*

END OF VOL. XIII.

